

Parisian Portraits

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FRANCIS GRIERSON

D'après le portrait par Geslin, Saint-Petersbourg

Parisian Portraits

BY

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PARISIAN PORTRAITS

ALEXANDRE DUMAS
(PÈRE)

My wanderings had landed me in Paris early in the spring of 1869, in the centre of the rush and roar of an Empire about to crumble away. I had arrived at the borders of a social maelstrom without knowing the meaning of its movement and mystery. Unconsciously France was preparing for war and revolution. Destiny went with a whirl, and no one was idle.

I was ignorant because of my youth ; the Parisians were ignorant because of their blindness. As delirium increases with fever so pleasure increases with prosperity ; and the Parisians, like so many spiders in a garden of roses, were busy weaving a web that would hold them prisoners when the flies were dead and the roses withered.

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From noon till late at night every one was busy. Napoleon and his court were busy; political intrigue was indulged in simply as an interlude between the fashions and amusements of the hour. Every one, from the Emperor down to the modest *bourgeois*, lived by the day. The people were like mechanics who prefer piece-work, for all had grown indifferent and independent; no one thought of the morrow. All prospered who cared to work. Beggars and drunkards were seldom seen; money poured into Paris from the provinces. For the French vineyards, in those days, supplied the whole world with wine, writers with wit, and the populace with good humour. The *opéra-bouffes* of Hervé and Offenbach kept Paris in roars of bacchanalian laughter. During the last years of the Empire Paris went mad over *Orphée aux Enfers*, *La Belle Hélène*, and *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*. Princes, millionaires, and potentates from abroad were regaled by the nonchalant beauty and piquant personality of Hortense Schneider, who, by her insouciant grace and artless abandon, seemed to typify the spirit of the dying age. Offenbach embodied the spirit

of the time in music, but Hortense Schneider gave it a living form. Auber—the wonderful octogenarian—had just composed *Le Premier Jour de Bonheur*, which was drawing all Paris to the Opéra Comique, and women of all classes raved over the singing of Capoul, the boy-tenor. *The First Day of Happiness*!—an innocent work, full of humdrum melody, composed by a typical optimist who never in his long life had known care or sorrow, who lived by the day, composed by the yard, and thought by the minute. But it was wonderful—this old man who could conceive passionate tunes like a young man just fallen in love! This opera represented the ideal of the *bourgeoisie* of the period. They oscillated between Auber and Offenbach—sentimental inanity and satirical farce.

Destiny unfurled her symbols, but no one could read them. Orpheus descended nightly into Hades and danced the cancan with Pluto's court. These things symbolised the end, but no one understood. At the Opéra, *Faust*—another symbol of disillusion—was the all-absorbing production, with Madame Carvalho, one of the last of the great dramatic

singers of France, as Marguerite. One thing was in harmony with another. People were passing out of the world of romance, and had not yet arrived at that of realism. The majority of the Parisians filled the gap between the two with careless merry-making, laughter that was half farce, half satire, and amusements that contained neither merit nor instruction. People danced and dined, wondered at nothing, asked no questions about the future. All were floating down stream in the pirate's craft manned by Napoleon. In twelve short months they would reach the open, and then, of a sudden, Charybdis and Scylla would loom bold in front of master and crew.

Meanwhile, the great writers were reposing after a lifetime of adventure and agitation. Hugo was in exile, Lamartine had just passed away, Flaubert and Georges Sand had retired to the country. Dumas alone was left in the capital. The lions of romance were leaving the field to the jackals of realism. Zola had already begun to gnaw the bones left by Balzac—for destiny had preordained a realist to depict the coming *débâcle*. Action for action, fact for fact, everything has its time

and place. Sedan fired the last volley over the grave of romanticism. This was the *état d'âme* of the Parisians on my arrival amongst them in 1869.

One evening in the beginning of June I was taken to the residence of Dumas, on the Boulevard Malesherbes, by an intimate friend of the great novelist. As one thinks of a lion, with his shaggy mane full of the jungle-burs of adventure, so I can see the author of *Monte Cristo* as he appeared on that memorable evening. Standing about were women friends—actresses, writers, poets, attracted by a world of romance symbolised in the figure seated in the middle of the salon. I was instantly impressed with two things: the frescoes on the walls and the attitude of the host. He sat like a silent oracle, surrounded by a crowd of female admirers, the whole company set off by panels representing life-sized figures from Goethe's great drama: Faust, Mephistopheles, Marguerite. There were no other pictures in the room. The influence of these figures, the attitude of Dumas and his worshippers, concentrated the mind on the quintessential element of romance. Half indifferent he sat, as some

handsome young woman would stroke his head, while another would place her hand on his shoulder, as they might have done with an old lion long tamed and without teeth. There was nothing to distract the mind from the harmony of idea and personality: the company of women might have been part of the frescoes, and Dumas the creator of *Faust* instead of *Monte Cristo*. There was an enchanted element about the people and the room.

There are two kinds of romance—the silent and the active. This scene was quiet and contemplative. A silent influence seemed at work; the picture was like the apotheosis of some Greek divinity; but there was something mediaeval in its simplicity and something Falstaffian in the huge figure surrounded by handsome and pleasant-faced women. What now was the current of his thought? What the state of mind of the man who had charmed the readers of two worlds and made romance a reality for thousands who never knew adventure?

The whole company conversed among themselves, standing as if they were at court, while the host sat still and mused. I was

held by the mystery, the fascination of the romantic atmosphere, the peculiar spell of the huge mass that filled the fauteuil like an idol of adamant. For there was something of the idol about the man. I thought of a Buddhist statue in a sitting posture, corpulent at the base, crisp at the top. The lower part of the face was of porcine dimensions, the skin swarthy, the hair bushy, the expression of the eyes calm and sphinx-like. He was a man who not only invented life, but had seen it.

Every matured mind has a cycle of personal experience. Genius begins life with notions and ends with ideas. What were Dumas' ideas now? A romantic Bacchus, who had written *Monte Cristo*, and compiled a dictionary of culinary art, what, at last, were his views of men and things? The form of a face corresponds to the spirit beneath, and had I been old enough to judge I might have guessed that this wonderful man was, above all things, a lover of sumptuous living, rare wines and rich dinners, romantic suppers after dramatic triumphs, the table decorated with human flowers from theatre, circus, and opera. I might have guessed that this

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immense frame was never made for fasts and vigils, and that, like Handel, he might have ordered dinner for three and cleared it off himself. And what must have been his powers of digestion! Think of the barrels of dynamic force consumed by such a human generator within a period of fifty years—the rows of Bordeaux and Veuve Clicquot, brought forth from cellars where spiders had put the finishing touch on the crusty bottle before it was sent up to weave new illusions in the brain of the weaver of romance; the rare fruits, in and out of season; the succulent dishes concocted by scores of famous chefs for his special delectation; the quantity and the quality of the viands, that went to produce books like *Monte Cristo* and *Les Trois Mousquetaires*! For a man who could dictate for two or three novels within the hour, and carry the plots along without confusion, must have had a marvellous memory and a perfect digestion. Voltaire sharpened his wits by forty cups of coffee a day, tea inspired Mozart, but Dumas lived on the pick of the viands and vineyards of France, the garden of the world.

Not till years after my meeting with the great novelist did I realise the full meaning of what he told me on that evening. At last he rose from his easy-chair and invited me into his study adjoining the salon. I had heard a good deal about his experiences in the world of occultism, and I was curious to find out, if possible, what he really believed.

After he had addressed me about my own career, the conversation turned on the mystical in art; but as I was anxious to know his ideas about a future life I put the question direct. He looked at me with the calm expression of one who had long since made up his mind. The answer was: "I believe in magnetism." He sat impassive, without moving an eyebrow or raising a finger. I was talking to the man who wrote *Le Collier de la Reine* and *La Comtesse de Charny*. Magnetism—the keynote of these and other of his books—was the keynote of Dumas' experience. This then was *his* secret. Here was *his* meaning of life. I put other questions—his mind was fixed; he refused to go beyond the wonders and mysteries of personal magnetism. This, he said, was the

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cause of the manifestations which had perplexed the world since the beginning.

There was no denying the fact, I was in the "presence of a sort of mystical sceptic. He believed in the reality of all occult phenomena, but not in their spiritual origin. He believed in second sight, palmistry, somnambulism, trances, magnetic attraction, magic, and mesmerism. And, in truth, his novels are based on the mystery of action, as Scott's are based on the poetry of action. A little more and the man sitting before me might have given a personal account of Mesmer himself, for the famous German only died in 1815. I shall never forget the tone of Dumas' voice, his look, when he said, "Je crois au magnétisme"; as much as to say, "I have got that far, about the rest I know nothing." It was the nonchalance of a mind that had passed beyond dispute and discussion. I could see in his face the result of a lifetime of thought given to one subject. For the author of *The Queen's Necklace* was now near the end of his days. I was sitting in the presence of one who would soon pass away. Here I had proof, in his own words,

that the celebrated romancist was not a manufacturer of sensational scenes in which he did not believe.

A novel is as much the work of heart and brain as a poem ; a novelist has to write as he thinks and feels. The style is the man. Away with the legend that Dumas was a literary pirate ! That his romances were without philosophical meaning, that he could not think, that he was no student of human nature ! It took me years to realise the full force of some of Dumas' novels. I now rank him among the seers. Listen to this from *The Taking of the Bastille*, chap. xxiv. :—

“The King desired Gilbert to explain to him that marvellous state in which the soul separates itself from the body, and soars free, happy, and divine above all terrestrial miseries.

“Gilbert, like all men of truly superior genius, could pronounce the words so much dreaded by mediocrity, ‘I do not know.’ He confessed his ignorance to the King. He had produced phenomena which he could not explain. The fact itself existed, but the explanation of the fact could not be given.

“‘Doctor,’ said the King, on hearing this avowal of Gilbert, ‘this is another of those secrets which Nature reserves for the learned men of another generation, and which will be studied thoroughly, like so many other mysteries which were considered insoluble.’”

Remember that this was written at a time when scientists were making fun of every new manifestation in the mysterious world of psychology. It was written before Charcot began his epoch-making investigations at La Salpêtrière, and before the Nancy school of hypnotism was thought of.

The last part of this chapter might have been written by Goethe or Emerson. It contains expressions that might have been used recently at a meeting of the British Association: “In science there is neither good nor evil; there are only stated phenomena or accomplished facts.”

Romance is nature reflected in the mirror of the mind. The superficial deny the power of romance as we see it manifest in Balzac and Dumas; but behind the romantic lies a vast realm of mystery, waiting to be revealed in hints and suggestions, which the unromantic can neither unfold nor

appreciate. There is no great art or science without imagination; it is the basic pillar of science as well as romance. The author of *Monte Cristo* had a philosophical mind controlled by a love of adventure, a love of the marvellous, and a clear conception of the power of human will. He had the intuitive gift. In him poetry took the form of material action. What we read in novels like *The Queen's Necklace*, *The Taking of the Bastille*, and *The Countess de Charny* was not put there by chance. There is in such a work a preordained revelation. These romances, and others, contain the stored batteries of a mental force whose current of thought in the world has had, and is still having, far-reaching results—the more effective because not recognised by the public. The majority of readers only look at the surface; but below the outward movement and what appears to the reader as mere sensationalism, in much of Dumas' work, lie the secret convictions of the man himself.

Romances like the above mentioned were partly the result of historical research and partly the result of personal observation.

He applied mesmerism to romance, and so prepared the way for the new psychology. Dumas did in his novels what certain professors of psychology are now doing at some of the American Universities. He made the word "magnetism" familiar to every physician and philosopher in France, and, through them, to others throughout the world. The magic resides in the imagination of genius, which is cyclic. The characters of Dr Gilbert, Balsamo, and Madame de Charny have had far-reaching results—greater results than the famous portraiture in Hugo and Balzac, which were ends in themselves. For Dumas' characters disclosed the first signs of future psychology. He went straight to the secret source of the mind's action, drew the veil aside, and gave his readers what seemed like real scenes and dialogues.

Never was romance so triumphant; for at the present time such scenes are being re-enacted under trained and experienced minds, in different parts of the world. In art, the drama, the pulpit, and even in practical affairs, the science of the mind has taken precedence of the old-fashioned theories of blind chance and results without law. Hugo's

influence was political and social, that of Balzac was social and ethical. With *Monte Cristo* Dumas took up the work which Mesmer left incomplete, and he was the first novelist to illustrate the power of volition over matter. His later work harmonised in thought and theory with Bulwer's *Zanoni*, the cycle of magnetic romance ending in Du Maurier's *Trilby*.

Dumas was the founder of a school which was to pass from the literature of imagination into a sphere of scientific experimentation. For mental phenomena like those set forth in many of his novels are no longer considered dramatic fictions. The scientific mind now regards them as facts, to be dealt with in the same order as wireless telegraphy and thought transference. Dumas wrote a series of romances to make clear his conception of magnetic force.

The world is not governed by what bodies of people do or say, but by ideas, as Plato has said. The man with an idea will master a crowd of a thousand persons with a thousand notions. In the presence of ideas our fancies and prejudices count for nothing. Dumas' personages were to him the ex-

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pression of a certain knowledge; he made his characters move and talk in harmony with the ruling idea in the novel, and not from chance or caprice. This is why he was as much a seer in his own sphere of action as Plato was in his.

The great romancer who sat talking to me probably knew that his novels had set up a cyclic action which would continue long after his death. He said nothing about the future of France; he seemed like one aware of the fact that he could learn no more, who was awaiting some important event.

When we returned to the company in the salon my impression was that of gliding from a philosophical reverie into an animated dream. I was borne along from one romantic scene to another with the current of circumstances without knowing how or why.

In little more than a year from that moment the boulevards would resound with the noise of drums and bugles; things would glide from the old order into the new as in a land of dreams and visions. What would become of this company of handsome women, this romantic room with its scenes from *Faust*, this imaginative

giant with a whole library of novels in circulation, many of which had already made the circle of the globe, enthralling all classes of readers, from kings in palaces to cowboys on the plains and squatters in remote regions of the antipodes? What would the Parisians be thinking and doing twelve or eighteen months hence? Who dreamed of national calamity? Here was the man who depicted France just before the Revolution. He had shown in *The Queen's Necklace* and *The Taking of the Bastille* what Paris was doing and saying up to the hour of that great event; but had he a notion of the second reign of terror which the calamity of Sedan was to bring upon the capital?

Voltaire predicted the Revolution and its consequences twenty-six years before the event; society, previous to 1789, was full of rumours and predictions, to which the Court and the nobility paid no heed. But just previous to 1870 there were no warnings; no one in society bothered about the political future. To the intrigues of a few agitators no one gave any serious thought. And yet prosperity was to make an end of the old order in 1870, as poverty had made an end

of the old order in 1789. Under Louis XVI. thinking brains and empty stomachs made an end of monarchy; under Napoleon III. full stomachs and empty heads did the business. With Bonaparte and Chateaubriand modern romance was born; with Napoleon III. and Alexandre Dumas the era of romance ended. But only for a time. Ideas are eternal. They repose for certain periods wrapped in the silence of the cloister and study; they await the season when gusts and cyclones carry the seeds of science to fields whose soil awaits their reception. They arrive in new places, in new attire, at the appointed hour, neither too soon nor too late—like guests invited in secret to appear in public.

The conscious universe is composed of kaleidoscopic changes, magical variations of scene and sentiment, illusions springing from illusions. In youth we are hurried on from one condition to another, too occupied with the rapid changes to think long on anything, powerless to reason from action to result.

Perhaps of all the persons present on that evening I was to be the least affected by the approaching upheaval. When the blow

descended on Paris I was in London. In the society of Belgravia and Park Lane few troubled themselves about the fate of Napoleon or the sufferings of the Parisians. Peace and prosperity reigned in England, chaos reigned in France. Amidst the nonchalant festivities of the British metropolis events in Paris seemed as remote as events in Russia. I thought of Offenbach, Hervé, Schneider, Auber, and Dumas. I thought of *Orphée aux Enfers* and its bacchanalian dances, of receptions at the Tuileries, and the Court—sandwiched between Prussian spies and Spanish rastaquouères, peppered with democratic parvenus and republican turn-coats,—of the butterfly elegance of the Champs-Élysées compared with the more ponderous equipages and scenes of Hyde Park, of the *bourgeoisie*, fascinated by the inane melodies of *Le Premier Jour de Bonheur* on the eve of fire and famine, awaiting in their cushioned seats, like fatted oxen in their stalls, the butchery of the morrow.

One day the cry was heard in the streets of London, "Capture of Napoleon!" It was the end. The panorama of Empire had

rolled itself out like the transformation scene in *Parsifal*. The people I had met at the house of the author of *Monte Cristo* were scattered far and wide. Napoleon the Little came to England to die; Dumas the Great escaped from Paris and passed away in the country within a few months of the *débâcle* at Sedan.

THE PRINCESS BONAPARTE-RATTAZZI

IN writing of complex natures there is nothing so difficult to put into words as the mental frame—the atmosphere in which such natures exist. Beauty, grace, and intellect create what is called personal charm, which is an outward and visible manifestation of harmony; for it has a rhythm and melody and a charm of its own; it illumines and inspires the persons who are drawn within its influence. When we speak of beautiful women as national types we mean women like Marguerite, or Rosalind, or Doña Sol—the German and the English fair, the Italian and the Spanish dark. We know what to expect, for the national types are never complex, and for that reason never formidable. Their influence is local, and

their light is dimmed by greater stars. As in a picture there must be a ground-work out of which the objects develop, so in a portrait of a subtle personality the writer must try to present not only the material surroundings, but the psychic element in which the person lives and moves.

Complex types are laws in themselves. They stand alone, like statues in a gallery of historical epochs, chiselled by artists who created but one each and then passed away. Eccentric people are among the easiest to depict because the mystery of enigma is lacking. True originality surprises and bewilders. It is composed of blending lights and shadows, characteristics that unite and harmonise as colours in the rainbow, not readily distinguished save by the most practised eye. But the keenest judgment is sorely tried in the presence of a personality at once poetic and romantic. Here we are bound to stop and ponder, wait for a mood which will open the realm of illusion for a passport to wander in the world of dreams, where the eye sees as in moonlight and the ear catches strains of music as in echoes. For we must enter

a land of enchanted vistas veiled in illusive mists, as in the paintings of Claude Lorraine, and live for a time in a circle of souvenirs whose episodes are as diadems that have graced the heads of beauty during a long cycle of poetic romance.

In such a world the Princess Marie Létizia Bonaparte-Rattazzi lived for more than half a century. Mrs Emily Crawford has lately said, à propos of the death of Madame Rattazzi, that she was the most gifted member of the Bonaparte family after the great Napoleon. But she conquered people, not by power, but by personal attraction. The world came to her wherever she happened to be, while her great ancestor repeatedly risked life and fortune in his efforts to maintain the ground and the glory he had won. She was enveloped from the first in an atmosphere of romantic beauty, which is separated from all other forms of beauty, as a natural gift is separated from learning, or a painting from a natural scene.

In Madame Rattazzi's character there was a blending of races. From the Bonapartes she had something regal. On entering her *appartement* the mind reverted to Roman

pomp and luxury in the time of the Cæsars. All through her salons one felt the masterful influence of the Napoleonic souvenirs, in the bust of Napoleon, his family, and his descendants. The long suite of rooms rose before the imagination like a vision out of reality. The sensation resembled that produced by the statues and heads in the Vatican. Power and beauty were here united in the marble figures that looked independent of time and part of immortality. They were there like the columns of the Parthenon, not as a mark of history, but as a symbol of perpetual law. Her rooms were so many boudoirs draped in blue, one opening into the other; and the Roman dignity of the marble busts was strangely etherealised by the azure satin of the walls and the furniture. The *appartement*, like the woman, was unique. When the visitor was ushered into her presence by a tall and pompous footman with a stentorian voice, Madame Rattazzi appeared as a natural setting in this historical and romantic atmosphere. She belonged to the *appartement* and the *appartement* to her. Here, in the noisiest part of Paris, removed three stories

above the harassed crowds that surge up and down the Boulevard Poissonnière, the blue *appartement* of the Princess Bonaparte-Rattazzi existed like something detached from the Parisian universe, suspended between the heavens and the earth as a fairyland set apart for poets and artists—a living picture from *Monte Cristo* or the *Arabian Nights*—to remind one that beauty is a real dominion as well as a dream. There was nothing like it anywhere else; and Madame Rattazzi moved among her guests as a personality apart. She was at ease in the elegance of her apparel and the splendour of her jewels; and upon a close scrutiny, under a blaze of light at the dinner-table, the thought came to my mind that the beauty of jewels is enhanced threefold when they are worn by a woman of such a type. The visitor from the first was impressed with the Roman and imperial air of the woman—a conqueror of intellectual minds, as Bonaparte was a conqueror of worlds.

When I first knew Madame Rattazzi, many years ago, she was still a handsome woman, and at her table I have met on a single evening Mrs Emily Crawford, Madame

Séverine, Henri Fouquier, Madame Catincka de Dietz (who was pianist to the Court of Louis Philippe), Napoleon Bonaparte Wyse, Tony Révillon, Maître Demarest, and Emilio Castelar. The first time I dined with her the table was laid with a service of forty gold plates upon which was engraved the Imperial arms. "Cette soirée est pour vous, vous savez," she said, as she took my arm and led the way to the dining-room. Her salon was a meeting place for the whole world of art and letters. Representative men and women assembled there from all quarters of the globe; and it was difficult to realise that these rooms were in the heart of Paris, that this woman belonged to the Third Republic, that the writers represented an age of democracy.

Madame Rattazzi sometimes looked Oriental. Her dark complexion and her large, dreamy eyes of pale grey made one think of Zenobia or Cleopatra—a captive who had enthralled her captors, a dethroned queen who had turned her enemies into courtiers and her rivals into imitators. Even at the age of sixty there were moments when her manner and expression had the freshness

and the naïveté of youth. This indefinable charm she inherited from her grandmother, Alexandrine de Bleschamp, who was a beautiful and witty Celt of Brittany. If the disposition of the Bonapartes gave her an imperial air, her Breton blood was the secret by which she penetrated to the heart of poets and artists, and which made her at home in the world of art and poetry.

• With all this, Madame Rattazzi was cosmopolitan. In the complexity of such a nature we discover, not an art, but the synthesis of a race of artists. She represented, in herself, an epoch evolved from other epochs, and a cosmopolitan spirit which made her at home in Naples or Florence, Paris or Madrid. She brought with her, wherever she went, the ambient air of poetic romance, which made her appear to the Italians as a symbol of grace and beauty handed down from the splendours of the past like an enchanted gift out of the Parthenon of the Muses, while to the Spanish she came with the ardour of Andalusian enthusiasm added to Castilian wit and refinement. To the Parisians Madame Rattazzi symbolised Napoleonic power and

conquest. They saw in her the glamour of composite talent and the enigma of a beauty that fascinates. She appeared to people of different countries as an apparition of their poetic ideals. She possessed the inexplicable gift of assuming and assimilating the characteristics of the people among whom she happened to be living. But this gift of itself would not account for her triumphant influence. It has been said of *Monte Cristo* that its fascination as a novel may be explained by the picture it gives of the triumph of the human volition over the impossible. It is not its realism which holds the mind captive, but the magic of its romance. The reader is impressed with the fact that in the personality of the Count of Monte Cristo there is an indefinable and mysterious quality which opens out a path before him, an atmosphere and world of his own in which people come to do his bidding. It is the poetry of adventure and the beauty of romantic mystery which give glamour to artistic as well as to personal charm. And this is why a woman like Madame Rattazzi exerted so great an influence over both intellect and imagination.

All great beauty, like all supreme art, is romantic and poetic. There are people who, in their blind infatuation for what they call realism, deny the power and influence of the very things which move and control the world most. We have but to compare one book with another, one person with another, to become convinced that mere power counts for nothing when placed beside personal charm. The higher forms of beauty everywhere dominate the material and the realistic.

Exiled by Napoleon in 1853, Madame Rattazzi founded a literary review at Aix-les-Bains which she called *Les Matinées d'Aix*. When, in 1863, she married Signor Rattazzi, the first Italian statesman of his day, the review was changed to that of *Les Matinées de Florence*; after the death of Rattazzi she married Señor de Rute, a member of the Spanish Cortes, and the review was again changed to *Les Matinées Espagnoles*. On the death of Señor de Rute she returned to Paris, and it appeared under the title of *La Nouvelle Revue Internationale*, with Castelar, the Spanish statesman, as editor-in-chief.

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While Madame Rattazzi was at her villa on Lake Bourget the greatest men of her time went from Paris to do homage to her beauty and seek inspiration in her society. Kossuth sought her counsel, Sainte-Beuve paid her for contributions to *Le Constitutionnel*. She took a leading part in the negotiations between the Italian Government and Garibaldi during the campaign of the latter for the liberation of Rome. Success and homage attended her everywhere. A memorable company of writers, politicians, and poets assembled at her villa in Florence to witness the production of her play, *Le Mariage d'une Créole*, in which she satirised the French Court. The supper that followed was cooked by Alexandre Dumas père. Her worshippers form a dazzling page in the history of personal beauty; the chimera of poetry and romance attracted and fascinated genius of every nationality and talent of every school. Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, and Eugène Sue represented romantic fiction at the salon of this remarkable woman; German and Russian princes brought her a courtly admiration, Lamennais and Lamartine the respect of philosophy and poetry, Roche-

fort and Révillon the fealty of the French democracy, Thiers and Jules Grévy the homage of French statesmen.

"No art," says Mr Henry James, "can successfully compete with life."

In the same spirit it may be said that no power can compete with natural charm. That is the magician under whose spell all other magicians must bow. In the unity of beauty, grace, intellect, wealth, political power, and the prestige of a great name, Madame Bonaparte-Rattazzi lived, not in a world of convention and imitation, but in a world of her own, whose atmosphere influenced others while she ever remained in the centre. Ordinary physical beauty, united to wealth and titles, never, except in the most material sense, succeeds in creating an element of poetic illusion. Women who possess beauty without the attractions of grace and intellect never attain to any real influence in society beyond that exerted in a local sphere. An illness, a few wrinkles, a short period of domestic trouble, and their brief reign is over.

Madame Rattazzi was not without her troubles and cares; and in the publication

of her review she spent part of the day in hard work at her writing-desk. Her novels and descriptive studies published in her own review would fill scores of volumes if published in book form. But in spite of a light-heartedness which often seemed the result of a frivolous disposition she never neglected her household duties and managed all her affairs with skill, while amidst innumerable political and social changes she appeared at the close of the old and beginning of the new as if she had just come upon the scene ready to lead or sustain a new party, group, or salon. For in such a nature there is no chance-work. The episodes seem inevitable. And everything about the woman was inimitable. In her writings her style had that suavity and charm that belonged to her personality. While her literature lacked deep thought, it had a power to rivet the senses and compel the reader to continue to the last page. Her pen glided along on the surface of things, describing what she saw and heard without the aid of philosophy or psychology, but with an art that was at once original and supreme. Seated at her desk, pen, ink, and words became as one, and her

style was never without a lucid and limpid fluency. Even when age was beginning to rob her of her beauty it did not rob her of the nervous, youthful charm in her writing—a quality which to the reader made her seem gifted with eternal youth.

One evening, while a guest of Madame Bonaparte-Rattazzi in President Carnot's box at the Théâtre Français, I was struck with the fact that of all the brilliant women there, none seemed to possess the cachet of originality and power that distinguished her personality; yet she must have been fully sixty at the time. The play—which was Henri Becque's *La Parisienne*—the dialogue, the actors, and the audience seemed to fade away, absorbed by that mysterious and indefinable element which enveloped her as in a world of romance and miracle. The wit of the author, the talent of the actors, the brilliant audience, served but as a frame to set off the jewels, the dress, the manner of the woman sitting there in the Presidential box, as if she herself had commanded the production of the play and issued the invitations.

Yes, life is greater than art, romance

more fascinating than the realism of every day; the beautiful has a greater charm than the powerful. Montaigne, in his essay on beauty, relates that when someone asked Aristotle why people oftener and longer frequented the company of handsome persons, he replied: "The question is not to be asked by any but one that is blind."

That Madame Rattazzi's influence in the political and literary world of Paris was maintained, not by her wealth and the prestige of her name, but by her personality, no one can doubt who has studied the course of events in Paris during the past thirty years. When Gambetta was alive the leading political salon was presided over by Madame Adam; but the people were attracted by the prestige of Gambetta's name. When the brilliant orator died, Madame Adam's political salon came to an abrupt end. She gave up the *appartement* on the Boulevard Poissonnière. Madame Rattazzi stepped in and turned it into a thing of beauty, where she presided until the day of her death. Her influence did not depend on the power of any person or group of

persons who frequented her salon, but on her own presence. That was the secret. And as her life had been one long romance of travel and change the element of the marvellous was always about her. It belonged to her. She never assumed a special position, never imitated a style or manner, never depended on exterior influences.

During the closing years of this wonderful life age at last began to show its effect. The woman who had shown so much common-sense and tact in the arrangement of her dinners and the selection of her guests grew careless, if not wholly indifferent. Her sight was dimmed and her memory failing. She no longer selected her guests, but invited a crowd. At last, in her efforts to be amiable to everyone she seems to have pleased no one. At her table swarmed a curious and sinister assembly, hustling and hungry, like wolves from the wilderness of Paris, their hunger and impatience expressed in low growls at the lateness of the dinner and the long periods between the courses. They tramped up the great flights of stairs like wandering spirits seeking a peep at the blue paradise above, descending at mid-

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night with the noise of brick and mortar falling from a tower. With the death of Madame Bonaparte-Rattazzi the last star in the romantic galaxy of the nineteenth century disappeared.

PAUL VERLAINE

THERE is a striking congruity in the three names, Villon, Voltaire, and Verlaine. The letter V, crossed at the top, forms a triangle ; to think of Villon is to think of Voltaire and Verlaine. They stand in the history of literature like symbolical figures on the dial of Time. They are pointed and personal ; they become permanent in the memory.

Two or three short poems, such as Villon and Verlaine have left us, refute with a stroke of the pen the maxims of philosophers who lay down rules for the training of the intellect and the development of talent. A single page discloses more intellectual force than tomes of scientific and psychological analysis. One line from Villon :—

“ OÙ sont les neiges d'antan ? ”

has swept through the avenues of Time like a souvenir of immortal regrets, and will pass

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on through the ages until the flood-gates of destiny swing together and the world fades on the shores of oblivion. There is more human feeling in two lines from Verlaine :

“ Il pleut sur le toit
Et il pleur dans mon cœur,”

than there is in the whole of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The sublime rarely moves us unless it suggests something intimate and poignant. The heart can no more forget the real than it can escape out of the body. A bird may leave the cage and “fly away and be at rest,” but the heart is without wings ; it is bound under a burden of perpetual cares and the souvenirs of eternal sorrows. If Dante's great poem had been a description of Heaven no one would read it. The interest centres in Hell and Purgatory. After these states he rises beyond the human ; he ceases to speak of the things that afflict the soul, and we leave the poet to the joys of his own imagination. What some people call the classical is a cold, inanimate thing born of the intellect. And the imagination alone has never yet satisfied the yearnings of humanity. Five hundred years hence Tennyson may only be quoted for a few brief lines

in which "tears from the depths of some divine despair" will mingle in Keats' Grecian vase with the odour of Omarian roses.

The difference between the exquisite and the sublime is the difference between the heart and the imagination. Of the palaces in which I have been a guest I have not seen one I would care to live in. We admire the costly decorations and the frescoed ceilings, which necessitate a wrench of the neck to appreciate, but we are glad to be back to a cosy cottage or a comfortable hotel. One evening spent round a blazing fire engenders more inspiration than a hundred spent before one carefully tended by a valet in brass buttons, the very sight of whom dissipates art and induces artifice. In literature the exquisite takes precedence of the powerful. It is the rare and the consummate which possess the perennial charm. Writing of Villon and Verlaine, the question of taverns and cafés arises in my mind. It was in a café in the Place de l'Odéon that I first talked with Verlaine. Now, there is as much difference between a tavern of the olden times and a modern café as there is between a brasserie and a club. I never could acquire

the habit of sitting at or in a café; but I found myself compelled to meet Verlaine at that particular café or not to see him at all. It was brilliantly lit, comfortable, orderly, and quiet. The poet was there when I arrived, and I was introduced by one of his friends. He appeared, as I had expected to see him, unaffected, and apparently unconcerned about anything or anybody. To judge him by the clothes he wore he might have been a carpenter or a bricklayer. But his face—there was no doubt about that! There was the face, genus Villon-Voltaire! Some might have called it the second incarnation of François Villon. In all Paris there was nothing resembling it. Over two sleepy, waggish grey eyes, a pair of mephistophelian brows curved upwards at the ends like an interrogation point in *Faust*. When he tipped his slouch hat back on his head he looked the picture of a mediaeval troubadour who might have gone about with a copy of Petrarch in one hand and a blunderbuss in the other. He smoked incessantly, occasionally taking a sip from a glass of cognac.

I divined beneath the drone-dreamy eyes

the dim souvenirs of a thousand meditations too subtle for words. Once in a while he straightened up, raised his brows, and with an inimitable gesture of bonhomie passed a trivial remark. Certain gestures gave the impression that he was trying to suppress some passing emotion, and it seemed to me that he was smoking not so much for enjoyment as to keep his face from relaxing into an expression of gravity.

Nothing, says Talleyrand, discloses the secrets of the mind so much as the mouth. To keep the mouth covered was this diplomat's way of maintaining facial composure. Verlaine, drowsy as he was on that particular evening, was doing all he could to assist nature in an attitude of indifference. Perhaps of all the devices of man to veil the true state of the mind that of smoking is the most effective. What has it not done to keep thought hidden from the crowd! The small glass of cognac before him helped him nothing; and I have noticed that the sipping of tea or coffee assists no one to hide the real expression of the face; that can only be done by holding a cigarette or a pipe in the mouth. And then the poet did not know me—I might

have been an envious rival or a newspaper man in search of copy.

Another poet, M. Jean Moreas, occupied a corner, where he played dominoes with a companion. Once in a while he would fix his eyes on his friend and say, with childish glee: "J'ai du talent! Moi, j'ai du talent!" tapping his breast with delightful egotism as he pronounced the words. M. Anatole France had just written a flattering notice of the poet's first success, *Le Pèlerin Passionné*. There was Verlaine, sitting before us like a sleepy lion; others, here and there, playing dominoes; the general calm broken now and again by the cry of exuberant naïveté: "Moi, j'ai du talent!"

Verlaine at last began to be talkative without saying anything worthy of note. Suddenly he proposed to accompany us to the Chat Noir. I offered some excuse. Sitting there, in an old, classical quarter of Paris, we were still in an atmosphere of poetic and artistic tradition. We were yet on the borders of sanity, in a world where we might, in imagination, touch the gold on Richelieu's robe, the locks on the wig of Racine, and the perfumed fringes of courtly

coquettes, in all of which some order might be surmised.

The difference between the independence of the garret and the disorder of the gutter is no more than six flights of stairs. There are people who try to hide the truth regarding the habit of spending a certain portion of the day or evening in such places, but the habit dissipates intellectual force. I noticed a clashing of individual interests and ambitions, which made me think of a cosmopolitan crowd at a table d'hôte.

I saw Verlaine twice again, once at his lodging-house, in a street in the poorest quarter of the Panthéon, close to Sainte-Geneviève, in the very neighbourhood frequented by François Villon five hundred years ago. These narrow streets have remained the same for ages. Villon had probably often walked through this street, perhaps even lived in it; but now the picturesque houses of his time have been replaced by ugly and unromantic stone buildings, which form conventional living-tombs for the unfortunate men of talent and genius doomed to live and die in them.

When we entered the house we saw a greasy-

looking proprietor, who conducted us to a bedroom on one of the upper floors. The room, with its old-fashioned bed with faded curtains, was the picture of canopied misery. The sight still haunts me, in spite of the intervening years. There was not a book or a newspaper or a hand-bag or an ornament anywhere visible ; nothing but the bed, a few chairs, and a table. I had visited genius on the top floors of dingy houses, in garrets far above the hum and movement of the material world, and yet in these places I had noticed signs of home-like comfort — there were books, an easy-chair, a pet cat or dog, and some one within calling distance. This room filled me with horror. The poet had alighted here like a bird of passage on a withered tree in the wilderness of Paris. He had come to this place I know not how nor for how long, and I am not sure that he felt the situation one way or the other, or gave himself much trouble about the appearance of the room, the house, or anything in it. I had opened the door of Bohemia, and looked in as we look at a ward in a hospital.

After waiting about ten minutes Verlaine entered. He carried a bowl with food of

some kind, and after a few words of apology he sat down and proceeded to eat the contents. My one thought now was how to get away, for I saw that the poet was not in a talking mood, and conversation under such conditions was not to be expected.

I saw Verlaine once again, and for the last time. It was on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, some months later. He walked with difficulty, leaning on the arm of a young man. They looked like two mendicants on their way home after having amassed a few sous at some church door. The unfortunate poet had altered considerably; he looked preoccupied, indifferent. He was going to pass me, when a sudden impulse made me stop him. To my great surprise he began to talk seriously. He spoke of his souvenirs of England. "Ah," he said, among other things, "what a difference there is between the word 'mère' and the word 'mother'! The English word is soft, homely, and musical. I love the English language. There is the word 'heaven'; how much more beautiful it is than the word 'ciel'! English is made for sentiment and poetry."

I was now talking to Verlaine the poet.

Every word he uttered was full of serious meaning. Pathetic beyond expression was the simplicity, the naïveté of his words and gestures. The mediaeval expression had gone from his face. It seemed to me that I was talking to one of Millet's peasants who had laid aside the hoe for a moment to express to a passer-by some of his most intimate and hallowed feelings. And so I had one more proof of the eternal verity uttered by the immortal ploughman: "A man's a man for a' that."

THE COMTESSE DIANE

DIANE MARIE DE SUIN, Comtesse de Beaussacq, author of *Maximes de la Vie*, and the proud possessor of a unique literary salon, was something more than a type of character, she was a personality.

Among the many agreeable surprises which my French book brought me was a letter from the Comtesse Diane, as she was called in the literary world. This remarkable woman was the Madame Sans-Gêne of intellectual Paris, the most independent, personal, and eccentric writer I had yet seen. Tall and angular, her long, masculine face was without the slightest colour. Her hair was red, and she dressed in lavender hues which gave her the appearance of some old and faded picture from the lumber-room of forgotten souvenirs.

When, in response to her invitation, I

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called upon her one afternoon, she held out two long fingers which I took between my thumb and forefinger and shook three times. She was alone, in an immense room, surrounded with a hundred and one tokens of departed days : furniture of the *ancien régime*, old bric-a-brac, locks of hair, and bits of autographs, framed and faded, relics of her father, Admiral de Suin, rusty swords, miniatures and portraits of poets : of Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, her friend the Queen of Roumania (Carmen Sylva), and fifty others, living and dead, filled the tables and covered the walls. It was a carpeted and comfortable museum of the epoch Louis Philippe, an *appartement* where the sun never shone, a kind of conservatory of monarchic regrets and royal souvenirs. An odour of the past pervaded the room, and Madame de Beausacq herself made me think of a mauve orchid tipped with yellow, that had withered on the wall of some neglected hot-house. She had by some means left a great patch of red matted dye just behind one ear, and her hair, which she wore anyhow, fell here and there in straggling bits, giving her the appearance of one who had been confined in an

asylum, had dressed up as Ophelia and escaped through the back door at the cry of fire—but not before being singed by a falling cinder. But her face bore an indubitable expression of power and distinction.

The conversation of the Comtesse Diane was in harmony with the look of strength and independence in her face. She said what she thought, which was another proof of her worth as a woman and her merit as a thinker. A mere title and riches, combined with such eccentricity, would have left her salon empty; and it was comforting to see this striking and powerful example of the triumph of brains over the flashy ambitions of wealthy parvenus. A parvenu can never say what she thinks, still less can she dress as she pleases. Madame de Beausacq's eccentric dress was an accepted matter of fact. She could do as she pleased. Academicians, artists, poets, and statesmen regarded her as an equal, and passed whole evenings in her company.

Before I took my leave she asked me to come to her weekly evening receptions, and said she would invite M. Sully Prudhomme to meet me.

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It was ten o'clock when I arrived on the appointed evening, and as Madame de Beausacq came forward she exclaimed, in drawling English: "Good-morning!" The salon was full of people, and I said, in return, "good-morning," for I was too amused to say "good-evening."

The hostess soon conducted me to Sully Prudhomme, who was sitting at the farthest end of the room. Here we conversed for one hour, and I was not sorry I had come.

"Art," said the poet-philosopher, among other things, "is, by its very nature, aristocratic. It is a principle of superior intelligence, and can never become common. Governments, systems, and religions may change or pass away, but what we call philosophical and artistic culture is the same in spirit to-day as it was in the days of Aristotle and Plato. The mind is the only aristocrat. Poetry, music, the faculty of discrimination, the sense of selection, taste and judgment, these qualities ever remain the rarest things, and they are eternal things."

The Comtesse de Beausacq tried hard to induce me to be present at a sort of fancy-

dress ball which she was giving in honour of her friend M. Pierre Loti. "You can come," she said, "in a simple domino." But I reasoned about it, and concluded that the wise thing to do was to refrain away. The ball was a kind of amusement in which I had no interest; nor did I care to see a writer whom I admired causing amusement by turning round and round in a hot, crowded room.

When I returned to Paris I saw Madame de Beausacq on several occasions. Her talk was so frank that I was always surprised as well as amused by it. "I thought she had taken leave *à l'anglaise*," she said, one evening, of a certain Russian princess who had called upon her; "I thought she had slipped away, and I was talking about her, when I turned round, and there she was, listening to every word I was saying!"

Madame de Beausacq abhorred the Republic and its ways, and treated some of her sister writers with that asperity so common among some women authors, especially in France. One day, alluding to the feeling of indifference she had for the world in general, she exclaimed: "*Ça m'est égal, ça m'est égal,*

tout m'est égal !” so rapidly that the phrase seemed one long word expressive of ennui and fatigue. She was only voicing the general sentiment of moral *délabrement*, but few of her sisters had the courage to admit as much. Everyone felt that the old régime was at an end forever, and no one seemed clairvoyant enough to predict anything specially good for the future. Therefore, “tout m'est égal !” was a fitting motto for all. It was a new turn to the old saying: “After us the deluge !”

The Comtesse Diane's book was introduced to the Parisian public by Sully Prudhomme in one of those short, pithy studies which speak volumes in a few pages and which only a master could pen. The preface is in itself a model of academical form and Parisian *esprit*; for Sully Prudhomme was born in Paris, and has never been hampered by provincial prejudice or sectional preferences. He understood the Comtesse Diane and the masculine quality of her intellect. Here is an example, from his preface, of combined wit and critical acumen, of a kind I have never seen surpassed and rarely equalled :

“You may well laugh at the psychologist. He excels in distinguishing and proving the faculties of the soul; he prides himself in showing you that it has sensibility and intelligence, in revealing to you all the different kinds of passion it possesses, and in proving that, nevertheless, it is free. This done, he is the dupe of everyone: a flatterer exploits him, a servant leads him by the nose. He is comparable to a naturalist who knows *à merveille* the anatomy of the species *Equus*, and who, nevertheless, is so bad a horseman that his mount leads him where he will and unsaddles him by the slightest swerve. The horsewoman, on the contrary, has never counted nor defined the muscles of the horse, but has experienced the sport of riding; by a slight pressure, by an imperceptible movement of the wrist, she guides him according to her pleasure and makes him take the gate which she desires. Thus she can furnish valuable information on the nature of the animals she has controlled. You are the horsewoman; you show us with the end of your whip the defects of the animal as well as his qualities, for you show neither prejudice nor malice, as if, always firm in the saddle in spite of rude jolts, you have never allowed your horse either to run away with you or to throw you.

“If I did not fear to fatigue you I would exhaust the comparison, and I would add

that in style as well as in method you also bring forward something of the horsewoman ; your phrase decorates the severe and graceful livery, for it is concise while remaining supple ; it suits well the black hat, but one feels that it is accompanied by flowing folds."

The maxims of the Comtesse Diane are not the result of daily impressions, for that would mean work of a superficial kind. They are the result of long years of experience and meditation. She told me how, having got the idea of a certain maxim, she could not find a fitting form until, at last, one day when she was crossing the Place de l'Opéra, the form of the *pensée* came like a flash. She had waited months to get a few lines in which the idea and the style might appear as one. This is what Buffon meant when he spoke of the patience of genius. Had Madame de Beausacq been a mere recorder of superficial impressions, instead of a serious thinker, she would have jotted down the idea in all its crudeness, without waiting for the one quality which was to give it a seal of distinction.

Some of Madame de Beausacq's reflections might have been written by a man who had

spent a life-time in the study of human nature. Only those who have experienced much and thought deeply could have written this :

“We penetrate to the bottom of things by a long and difficult road ; then, when we announce the truth at which we have arrived we are astonished to find that we are not always understood : this is because a truth is not rendered evident save by the souvenir of the road which led to it.”

As a rule, intelligent people begin to think profoundly after the thirty-fifth year. Before that age deep feeling is usually mistaken for deep thinking. Suffering never does us any good until it begins to make us think. The artist or writer who has not arrived “by a long and difficult road ” cannot understand the wisdom of the one who has. But it is not enough to meet with one or two serious stumbling-blocks in one’s path in early life. It is only when we have passed through whole cycles of adversity and disappointment that we begin to reason and think for ourselves. In youth we all make the mistake of confounding nerves and emotions with brain-power and critical discrimination. Again the Comtesse Diane says :

"Young, we are hard to please in happiness ; later, we become less exacting, because we know the cruelties of life. It is audacious to attempt to render happy he who has not yet suffered."

The fastidiousness of youth is almost always the result of inexperience and provincialism. At a certain age we cease to be fastidious and become critical. Madame de Beausacq was, perhaps, thinking of herself when she wrote: "It is great boldness to dare to be simply oneself." It is indeed ! And she might have added: it requires a gifted personality to do it. The Comtesse Diane certainly possessed "great boldness," but she could carry it without wavering. It was a comfort to think that in the most fashionable city in the world intellect could set at defiance all the prevalent modes and many of the accepted customs. To dare to be simply oneself implies, in such a case, the extreme limit of personal independence, with the consciousness of personal power. To see Madame de Beausacq standing among a crowd of young and fashionably-dressed women, artists, academicians, and distinguished soldiers, was a sight I shall never

forget. She was sure of her friends—for the public she did not care. Her "boldness" lifted her above the caprices of fashion and the whims of vanity. "We can live in peace with him whose sentiments differ from ours, but not with him whose sentiments are less high than ours, because we do not respect them." She was not obliged to agree with the sentiments of her friends, but she demanded that her friends should be on her own plane of thought. And this is what we all demand. Friendship is not possible on any other basis. "To make a good enemy," she says, "take a friend: he knows where to strike." And here is an aphorism which explains, in part, the constant demand for light musical plays and the music-hall: "Distraction is to mental anguish that which chloroform is to physical suffering: it does not heal but it suspends; it is the instinct of preservation that leads the unhappy person to procure, in a momentary repose, the strength to suffer still more."

I noticed a large number of red ribbons at Madame de Beausacq's receptions; but when so many wear an official decoration it is hard to see where the distinction lies.

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Perhaps the true philosophy of these decorations is to be found in the material benefit they afford the wearers. The world looks at the red ribbon and bows—not to the talent which it is supposed to indicate, but to the social power which all suppose it to confer. The French, being an economical people, put vanity to a practical use: they wear the red ribbon on the street and in the salon. It is like a standing sign which says to the beholder: “Gare à vous, je suis quelqu’un!” Or, in the case of a fat bourgeois, with a head and face like a chimpanzee: “Have a care, for I am not what I look!” And yet there are people who deny the meaning of the symbolical! If we see a man with the air of a pastry-cook in evening-dress, ribbons or stars on his coat will not excite our interest to know who he is. Men are interesting for what they are, not for what they assume.

One evening at the Comtesse Diane's, M. Laurent Tailhade recited some witty *vers libres* of his own, satirising a well-known writer. But as the verses belonged to the new school the hostess had to admit that she did not understand one line, nor could

she tell what it was all about. She belonged to the academical world ; the new art did not attract her. The old ignores the new, and the new discards the old. This seems to be the law in society as in art. At the salon of the Comtesse Diane one age was treading on another's heels. The old were passing away—as she has now herself passed away—and the new were gradually filling up the vacant places. M. Pierre Loti, although he brought with him a new art, brought nothing to offend the academical conventions. When he was elected a member of the Académie his attack on the realism of Zola was inspired by the sentiments of his friends, Madame de Beausacq and the Queen of Roumania. This discourse offended the Parisian public. But M. Loti, who wandered about the high seas like the Flying Dutchman, gave himself little thought about the Parisians, their likes or their dislikes. He could well afford to say with the Comtesse Diane : “Ça m'est égal, ça m'est égal, tout m'est égal !”

SULLY PRUDHOMME AND THE FRENCH ACADEMY

SULLY PRUDHOMME was a true type of the Academician. Nature fitted him for the position. Philosopher, poet, and psychologist, he had the easy manners of a Parisian, the experience which adds certainty to intuition and gives a sort of clairvoyance to one's conception of people and things. He was an ideal type of the scientific mind set off by the poetic. In France science seems to go hand in hand with art ; there is something mathematical and logical in the national temperament.

Pascal and Comte were mathematicians, and Berthelot was aided in his laboratory by an intuition which sprang from a principle of æsthetic harmony in his nature and made him susceptible to the most delicate dis-

crimination in matters of art. Take a man like Sully Prudhomme, who was born and bred in Paris, educated at the Ecole Polytechnique, gifted with a philosophical, poetic, and logical mind, and we have a man who is severe with himself, severe with the world, severe with all forms of art and all manner of artists. He begins life by battling with his own illusions. He examines himself. A poet, he knows why he is sensitive; a philosopher, he knows why he suffers; a psychologist, he knows how to distinguish between mental and physical moods; the deceits of the eye, and the realities of sense. Having passed an examination in the university of his own intellect, he is equipped with a rapier-logic that parries with ease the most formidable onslaughts in the realm of reason; he proceeds with caution, works with extreme care, applies a method of criticism to his own moods, sifts, analyses, weighs, and waits, without growing impatient or losing his temper.

Thinkers and poets like Sully Prudhomme never recede from the position which they assume at about the age of forty. The man destined for the Académie is, at that age, a type of the logical order in mental growth.

There are two kinds of academicians : the natural and the pedantic. Sully Prudhomme represented the academical mind at its best. Growing up in Paris in a liberal and progressive age, he was not burdened in the beginning with a load of prejudices, as was the case with MM. Brunetière and Lemaître. There are prejudices which, if left uncorrected till the age of twenty, prove tyrants that mar the repose and the judgments of a whole lifetime. The pedantic nature and the poetic nature can no more exist together than fog and sunshine. The man who wrote *Le vase brisé* could not be a pedant if he tried ; but when we consider that this poet was also the author of *L'Expression dans les Beaux Arts* — a work which must have cost him fifteen years of profound thought—we may well wonder at the union of the scientific and the poetic in his nature. He thought, worked, and lived with method. Even in his short poems — perfect in sentiment and form — the art, as in Keats, elevates the sentimental to a dignified consciousness of his method and his manner. There is power in his sentimentalism, virility in his passion, conviction even in his tears. His intellectual emotions were always

manifest in a classical form. There was something Aristotelian in his nature; and there was a touch of Pascalian melancholy in his metaphysical speculations. •

Sully Prudhomme was a psychologist; but psychological speculation and mystic speculation are two different things. Poet, he longed for the ideal and the immortal; scientist, he was sceptical without wishing it; agnostic, he was willing to hear all sides, explore all doubtful corners, listen to every argument with patience. This poetic-philosopher was not of a mystical turn of mind because of his penchant for the scientific and the classical. He was an unwilling sceptic. But he could arrive at a belief in the immortality of the soul through some occult demonstration, provided the demonstration accorded with his ideas of common sense and scientific proof.

I have often been struck with the calm demeanour of true Parisians under conditions that would disconcert other Frenchmen. Beside them, those from the southern provinces are apt to appear volatile and *exalté*. A man like Sully Prudhomme takes his pleasures with a certain philosophical method,

and he knows both by intuition and experience what to see and hear and what to avoid. He takes no risks with his time and his intellectual distractions. He is a born economist in regard to visits, promenades, conversations, amusements, meditations, and repose. He early learns the art of refusing, which is accomplished not so much by French politeness as by Parisian tact — for there is a marked difference between the two. I could see no difference between the manners of a French duke of the old régime and those of Sully Prudhomme, a man who sprang from the people. No matter where I met him, he was always master of himself: at ease in new situations, ready for any conversational emergency, his wits in harmonious order like a perfectly tuned instrument, entering with zest into any subject of artistic or philosophical importance, able to elucidate the most subtle point in the most metaphysical argument. But he sometimes appeared as if he were thinking of something beyond the actual present. There was a look of abstraction about the blue-grey eyes; and once at his own residence he sat so still and silent that I was on the point of leaving; he seemed

fatigued and indisposed; but he was only in a reverie, for suddenly he began to talk with brilliancy. I had noticed this look of abstraction when I first met him in the salon of the Comtesse Diane, an expression that distinguished him from all the other men present. Without a suggestion of the eccentric, in appearance or dress, he presented to the observing eye that cachet which set him apart and made of him a personal unit in a room full of intelligent people.

Ideas distinguish one face from a crowd of faces. People with simple notions, which they often mistake for thought, are what they seem; people who live in the world of ideas are never what they appear to the unobserving world. A man with ideas is ever considering, comparing, resolving, analysing for himself; the brain is continually at work in the most serious and difficult sense of the word. The man with mere notions can never possess or even assume an abstract expression. Nature sets a seal on every countenance. She alone bestows the patent which is visible to all, according to degree, and which the knowing never confound with other degrees.

We are told that Victor Hugo used to sit, surrounded by a company of admirers, as if he were alone, in a sort of dream, yet conscious of all that was being said. All the greatest philosophers, artists, and scientists have had this abstract look. It causes many of them to appear bored at moments when other people are being interested. But the attitude of silence is not necessarily one of boredom. With Sully Prudhomme it meant that he was acting naturally. I never discovered the faintest suggestion of pose either in his speech or in his manner. And, somehow, people who are born to any authority or excellence find affectation foreign to their nature and therefore impossible. His attitude was never that of the "official" academician, with a cultivated frown, a single eye-glass, and a supercilious eye-brow, formidable alike in pose and pedantry, but the attitude of one who had arrived, after long years of serious thought and work, at a condition of life in which he felt himself at ease, with no more comfort than is needful.

Sully Prudhomme had no salon, properly speaking; but he had certain days when young poets sought his advice, which the

master gave with kindness and affability. He was too sincere to be hypocritical, and too frank to show flattery. Although living in the heart of Paris, in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré,* the poet rarely accepted invitations of any sort, and he probably received and refused more than any other academician since the death of Victor Hugo. When he left his home he did so with good reasons. He avoided dinner-parties, banquets, fashionable gatherings, and late hours ; and this not because of poor health, for the poet when I first knew him was in the prime of life, but because of his dislike of social comedies and comédiennes. His friendship for the Comtesse Diane was a source of bitter jealousy and envy to some women who could find nothing better or worse to say than that Sully Prudhomme was the author of her *Maximes de la Vie*. The cause of this jealousy was to be found in the fact that the poet had never appeared at their receptions ; they naturally vented their anger on the Comtesse Diane. Jealousy, like love, is blind. In Paris there are so many people who appear night after night at the dinner-table of other people that society lives in the

illusion that all Paris is alike in this matter; and Parisians know that among the academicians there are always a few whose function it is to be the orchid in the centre-piece of the social circle.

The Académie represents many phases of life: political economy, the Church, the drama, poetry, literature, and the diner-out. Academicians are well aware that the institution must possess as many typical minds as possible; it is, therefore, filled with types. A few are what Emerson would call representative men. Until recently the Académie had among its members three dukes, one bishop, one statesman, one journalist, and one lawyer. I fear the dukes and the bishop were elected for a special purpose; they were doubtless meant as wave-offerings to the four cardinal points of mammon, grace, fashion, and bon-ton—as frankincense to deodorise the altar of Demiurge. They sweeten the social atmosphere, as a censer waved in a cathedral envelops both sinners and saints in the same cloud of sanctified odours. The Duc d'Aumale was certainly distinguished for his generalship as well as for his history of the House of Condé. But

he was the son of a king and the owner of Chantilly, and these things combined made the temptation too potent for the Académie to withstand. Perhaps six academicians out of forty are truly gifted; with something original to say, possessing some distinctive trait that is not to be found in their contemporaries.

There is in every age a fixed number of scholars, artists, philosophers to every million men. Academies cannot create talent that does not exist, neither can they nullify what is. But by some freak of humour, whether from jealousy or blindness, so great a genius as Balzac never became an academician. Others might be named who never became members—masters in the fullest sense of the word. Indeed, the term "Immortal," applied to the members, is only exact once in a fixed number of names, as the prizes in a lottery appear in a fixed number of drawings. Talent and genius are not mysterious sprouts which spring up from a seedless soil.

But there are two stumbling-blocks in the path of the French Academy : pedantry and social snobbery. When a certain number

of titled men have to be elected it becomes evident that a certain number of untitled authors must be rejected, and among them some who are gifted with real power. The truth is, the Académie is a relic of the *ancien régime*, regilded by the Republic. Its fauteuils have been renovated with republican springs and democratic cushions; but Richelieu's robe hides the springs, the cushion, and the democratic upholstery.

The Académie, being a union of two distinct ages, cannot help being paradoxical. Its mind is classical, its heart aristocratic, and its manners modern. Every royalist who becomes a member feels that he returns to his own; every democrat, that he has received a patent of nobility. In his frantic efforts to be elected Zola admitted that he wished to take one foot out of the "Ventre de Paris" and the other out of the dung-heaps of "La Terre"; but the dukes, the orthodox party, and even the republicans—unconsciously metamorphosed into the old spirit—declared that the Académie was no place for the odours of *La Halle* or the fumes of *L'Assommoir*. It was the one fatal blunder of Zola. His enemies laughed

and his friends pitied him. What, indeed, was the author of *Nana* and *La Bête Humaine* doing in leaving his cards on the Duc d'Aumale, the Bishop d'Autun, and the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*?

No; the Académie has a secret and invisible line drawn which separates the things that are *de trop* from the things that are *de rigueur*. What it objects to is not lowly birth, but that which it considers common in thought and form. Sully Prudhomme was of lowly birth, but the quality of his work is that of the highest culture. Zola tried to storm the academical citadel by repeated and violent efforts, and failed; but the poet-philosopher was, so to speak, one of the fore-ordained. He rose from the most humble social sphere, yet was not opposed, seeing that he was equipped with the accoutrements of pedantic learning (for which he had no use) and a poetic gift which would do honour to the whole assembly. The Académie welcomes a type of intellect such as Sully Prudhomme: a scholar, a dialectician, a poet of the classical order, a born Parisian, and a man of the gravest correctness. The assembly objects to everything that savours

of Bohemianism. I cannot call to mind an academician, living or dead, who belonged to the Bohemian world. The Académie does not balk at materialism; it does not refuse realism if enveloped in Gallic wit and art. It does not debar the democratic spirit when it assumes the form of the novels and dialogues of M. Anatole France. For all these elements, once within its fold, become fused in the all-powerful hierarchy of letters. With the Académie a man's opinions are not of such importance as the frame he gives them; and his sentiments are without value unless he can clothe them with the dignity of art.

The Académie, then, resolves itself into a question of intellect set off by art. Sully Prudhomme, had he never written a line of poetry, would have been an eligible candidate as soon as his great work, *L'Expression dans les Beaux Arts*, was published. The mere title of this work is enough to indicate the range and culture of the author's mind. The Académie Française loves a mind of this order, for it represents the French character in its most authoritative habit. Those who have judged Sully

Prudhomme without having read his prose works can have but a poor idea of his powers as a philosopher and psychologist. In his prose he gives a rational explanation of emotions which spring from art, music, poetry, and beauty in the human form. He tells us why we are influenced by colour, rhythm, sound, and expression.

Between the school of Sully Prudhomme and that of Stéphane Mallarmé there was, and is, a wide difference. Speaking for myself, I may say that I enjoyed the conversation of the one poet as much as the other. I stated in the beginning of this study that Sully Prudhomme was a type of mind that is not easily moved and influenced by the new in matters of literary form. His poems were conceived and written according to strict rules of poetic composition, and he would have young poets write under the same rules. He believed that the principles of art are like mathematical laws, from which there can be no deviation without failure. Whether right or wrong, he was sincere, and sincerity characterised his speech, his writings, and all his acts.

If he was conservative in his ideals of art and poetry, he did his best to further the efforts of modern philosophy and social science. In his own quiet way he did more than any other member of the Académie to illuminate certain dim regions of the new psychology. In the higher realms of investigation science without spiritual sentiment is a mockery of the truth; but Sully Prudhomme accomplished the miracle of harmonising certain psychic phenomena with scientific reason and spiritual law. His sphere of thought was as vast as genius itself, and, although labouring under seeming restrictions, his life and work were successful, not only in a local but a universal sense.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ was one of the original members of the band of poets who called themselves Parnassians. His companions in the early days were François Coppée, Sully Prudhomme, and Catulle Mendès. There were many others. All became more or less celebrated later on, but Mallarmé broke away from conventional poetic bonds, and found himself, without wishing or trying, at the head of a literary salon the like of which had never before been known in Paris.

• The real founder of the Parnassians was Louis Xavier de Ricard, a mere boy, the son of General Marquis de Ricard, who acted as aide-de-camp to Prince Jerome. The young Parnassians first met at the salon of the Marquise de Ricard, 12, Boulevard des

Batignolles. Here in the soft light of the sumptuous salons, amidst rich brocades and rare Gobelins, the celebrated Parnassian School of poets had its beginning. Had there been no meeting-place like this, the Parnasse might never have become known.

Young Louis de Ricard was a dreamer, who had a passion for poetry, but not the gift to create it, a passion for philosophy without being a philosopher. He founded a review, and proceeded to attack the Empire. He had his review promptly suppressed by Napoleon's police. He then dropped philosophy and republicanism, and founded a new review entitled *L'Art*. Then came the first number of the *Parnasse Contemporain*, the title being a happy inspiration of that wonderful youth, Catulle Mendès. When I arrived in Paris in 1869 the Parnassians were already organised, and the meetings at the salon of the Marquise de Ricard had become regular functions.

Here François Coppée read aloud to a company of his young friends his unpublished poems, and Sully Prudhomme first read his *Vase Brisé*, which later made him celebrated. Two of the poets of this extraordinary group

were the two friends, Stéphane Mallarmé and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, the first of whom lived to make his name known far beyond the confines of France. The young Parnassians were in need of a poet of mature years to lead them, and they found him in Leconte de Lisle, the creator of the *Poèmes Antiques* and the *Poèmes Barbares*. From 1874 to 1884 Victor Hugo cast his vote, the only vote, in favour of Leconte de Lisle for the Académie, but the gifted author of the *Poèmes Barbares* was elected at last through the efforts of his two disciples, Sully Prudhomme and François Coppée. At the salon of Leconte de Lisle one met many of the leading poets and writers—José de Hérédia, Anatole France, Judith Gautier, Henri de Bornier, Ernest Renan, and a score of others.

My first visit to Stéphane Mallarmé was made one day just after leaving the house of M. Paul Bourget; and I seldom think of the poet without also thinking of the novelist.

To go from the residence of M. Bourget to that of Mallarmé was like going from one city to another. From the Faubourg Saint-

Germain to the Rue de Rome one passes from a world of conventional refinement to a quarter of Paris with no historic or social interest. Independent, both in the intellectual and the material sense of the word, M. Bourget chose that part of the city which suited his tastes. Mallarmé had to live not where he pleased, but where he could. The street inhabited by the novelist was flanked by old walls, behind which lay the mansions of the old nobility; and the interior of his residence was in keeping with the customs and the modes of the neighbourhood. Subdued in tone, yet richly furnished, the place had the air of refinement which one is accustomed to see in the houses of the conservative aristocracy.

It always gives one pleasure to see artists and writers living in comfort, removed from the noise and distractions of the world; but I found Mallarmé living in a house that resembled thousands of other houses. There was no distinctive character in anything, except in the man himself. M. Bourget is a personal power in his writings. Mallarmé showed his power in manner, disposition, and personal charm. Without his person-

ality his literature alone would hardly have attracted so many writers of different schools.

Mallarmé's reception room was so small that a company of fifteen persons filled it. Yet, to this little room, containing nothing but a centre table and chairs, came the intellectual youth of France, representing every school and social grade—future academicians, deputies, diplomats, novelists, editors, historians, and composers, the visitors being of all ages, but principally under thirty.

The yoke of officialdom lies heavy on the neck of genius. Mallarmé was one of the few who remained independent. But even in this he did not try,—it was the nature of the man. To see him stand by the fireplace rolling a cigarette, talking in a low voice, half to himself, half to his visitors, was to see a man free from conventional bondage. And it was like arriving at a cool mountain-spring after a long tramp through a burning desert. The visitor came here without fear, hindrance, or hypocrisy. The body rested while the spirit was being refreshed. There was neither loud talk, discussion, attempt at wit, nor striving after effect. This little room was

the one place in Paris where the soul could manifest itself in freedom. Everywhere else pose and persiflage were in order. Any one coming here with the airs of a patron would, in a few moments, settle down in his seat, subdued, transformed by the serenity of the place.

Once I witnessed the arrival of an obstreperous visitor; but Mallarmé, with his usual easy manner, let silence bring about the miracle of subjugation. The visitor, once seated, was soon overcome by the collective calm. When he tried to lead the conversation the host allowed him to talk for a time, then, turning to M. Henri de Régnier, sitting in the corner by the fireside, he addressed him in an undertone, thus adroitly shifting the loud talker to one side. This was the only salon where a company dared to sit for any time without a clatter of words. In the other salons animated conversation was considered the correct thing; without it people would feel troubled or bored; at other houses it was the custom for visitors to seek the acquaintance of other visitors, the host in many cases being, like Leconte de Lisle, incapable of holding the attention of a company.

Whistler and Manet have pictured Mallarmé at two periods of his life. Whistler's subtle portrait suggests the apparition of an extraordinary personality between two epochs—the old and the new. Time, like a dream, has settled over his features as the mists of twilight over an enchanted landscape; there is a suggestion of a poetic veil separating him from the world like the smoke from his cigarette, which, he said, he used as a screen between himself and the crowd.

In Manet's canvas the poet is younger and reminds one of Deroy's portrait of Baudelaire. The expression is anxious and the figure restless; the conflict between the poetic and the material is at its height; he has not yet learned how to discard the perplexing, dismiss the puerile, enter the sanctuary of his own gods and abide contented there. For the truth is that, although Mallarmé was born in Paris, and had experienced the innovations of the Second Empire, the Third Republic, the bourgeois realism of Zola, the pretensions of unoriginal minds like the Goncourts, and the irony of critics like M. Jules Lemaitre, he belonged to the *ancien régime*. Mallarmé was an intellectual aristocrat. His tranquil

dignity, spiritual poise, politeness without hypocrisy or affectation, his freedom from the usual vulgarities of a society skilled in the art of sensation and puffery, made him conspicuous. But there was method in the obscurity of his literary manner. He was obscure with a purpose. He would make it an impossibility for the critic *à la mode*, be he a Brunetière or a Lemaître, to scale the barriers of his poetic domain.

When I first knew Mallarmé, in 1889, the official professors were in a strange state of ignorance respecting his influence. Here was a man, living very near the borders of actual want, exercising a power which no millionaire could claim. Here was an intellectual magnet that attracted other intellects, causing young poets, artists, and journalists to mount four flights of stairs once a week to sit and listen to what words might fall from the lips of the master. He drew them towards him, not by his will, but by his influence. He never made an effort to induce a visitor to return, never flattered, never tried to be more amiable to one than to another.

Bourget was independent, but Mallarmé

was even more so. Let us not be blinded by appearances—the gifted novelist, living in aristocratic seclusion in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, could not attain such privacy without much care and effort. He was in Paris, but not of it. Mallarmé, the poet and dreamer, was not only in Paris, but a vital part of its intellectual life. A Socrates in the world of symbols, he might as well have lived in a tent or sat in the market-place; for, with him, art and life were in no way connected with the fashionable world.

Here is a typical example of Mallarmé's manner:—

*“ Des avalanches d'or du vieil azur du jour
Premier, et de la neige éternelle des astres,
Mon Dieu, tu détachas les grands calices, pour
La terre jeune encore et vierge de désastres.”*

In a prose poem, entitled *Frisson d'Hiver*, the poet is seen in a far simpler mood. I give an excellent translation by Mr Arthur Symons:—

“FRISSON D'HIVER.

“The old Saxony clock, which is slow, and which strikes thirteen amid its flowers and gods, to whom did it belong?

"Thinkest that it came from Saxony by the mail-coaches of old time?

"(Singular shadows hang about the worn-out panes.)

• "And the Venetian mirror, deep as a cold fountain in its banks of gilt work; what is reflected there? Ah! I am sure that more than one woman bathed there in her beauty's sin; and perhaps if I looked long enough, I should see a naked phantom.

"Wicked one, thou often sayest wicked things.

"(I see the spiders' webs above the lofty windows.)

"Our wardrobe is very old; see how the fire reddens its sad panels! The weary curtains are as old, and the tapestry on the armchairs stripped of paint, and the old engravings, and all these old things. Does it not seem to thee that even these two birds are discoloured by time?

"(Dream not of the spiders' webs that tremble above the lofty windows.)

"Thou lovest all that, and that is why I live by thee. When one of my poems appeared didst thou not desire, my sister, whose books are full of yesterdays, the words, the grace of faded things? New things displease thee; thee also do they frighten with their loud boldness, and thou feelest as if thou shouldst use them—a difficult thing indeed to do, for thou hast no taste for

action. Come, close thy old German almanack that thou redest with attention, though it appeared more than a hundred years ago, and the kings it announces are all dead, and, lying on their antique carpet, my head leaned upon thy charitable knees, on thy pale robe, oh! calm child, I will speak with thee for hours; there are no fields, and the streets are empty, I will speak to thee of our furniture. Thou art abstracted.

“(The spiders’ webs are shivering above the lofty windows.)”

There was a notion prevalent that Mallarmé’s salon was frequented exclusively by poets and artists of the symbolical school; but I soon realised the folly of believing in hearsay evidence. His visitors represented all the schools of the day; and it is easy to understand the jealousy of some of the Sorbonne professors who saw young authors of talent doing homage to a man who paid no heed to the examples of the academicians. It was but natural that “official” professors should pretend that Stéphane Mallarmé was without serious influence. Their attitude was, in part, the result of ignorance. Who has ever met with an official professor who

gave himself the trouble to learn the truth by seeing the outside world with his own eyes, and hearing its voices with his own ears?

It was by visiting this salon¹ many times, during a period of several years, that I arrived at the truth. I learned, after repeated visits, what a far-reaching influence went forth from this obscure room. Little did the professors at the Sorbonne know of this ascendancy, revolving, as they were, in their own limited circle which they mistook for the universe. Louis XVI. imagined that the taking of the Bastille was an insignificant street brawl. How could he know what was going on in Paris when he spent his time at Versailles? The people were taking power out of his hands; he was not among them; he could not see the truth. At a time when academicians were ridiculing Mallarmé, he, without trying, was undermining the old edifice with hundreds of disciples, many of whom had been the cleverest students in the *lycées* of the Latin Quarter. Some of these young men were already acknowledged journalists of talent, others would become critics, playwrights, politicians.

So great was the outcry in 1889 and the following years that the question of abolishing the Académie Française was freely discussed, many deputies taking sides with the young writers of the advanced schools. It needed only a few visits to Mallarmé's salon to convince me that here was the one vital force operating in the literary world of Paris. Renan was lecturing at the Sorbonne; Mallarmé was rolling cigarettes and talking nonchalantly to visitors at his own fireside. Renan, the giant, spoke from an official platform, but the poet of the Rue de Rome was now the man of power.

What illusions float about the academical chair! It is surprising that writers of independent means put themselves to so much humiliation to enter the Académie. When Renan became a candidate he began the course of official visits and found himself one evening at the dinner-table of Victor Hugo. The guests talked freely, but Renan sat like a timid schoolboy, with his eyes cast down, giving the *réplique* to Hugo in four words: "Oui, maître; non, maître"; not daring to go further for fear of offending the host, and so losing his vote.

The sphere of a writer's influence is fixed. Every soul has its own world. But sometimes one writer brings to mind another. In his personality Mallarmé made me think of Whitman and his artless simplicity and unaffected sincerity. But the features of the French poet were unlike any other poet or writer, living or dead. There was nothing eccentric about his face or his person, and he never put on evening dress to receive his visitors. His receptions were for men, and the poet appeared in the clothes he had worn during the day. In this he also reminded me of Walt Whitman, whom I saw in Washington in 1868. Mallarmé opened the door himself for his guests when they arrived, and went to the door with them when they left. I never saw him sit in the presence of his company. This might have led to some clatter among the guests. The guests came to hear Mallarmé, not to talk among themselves.

At first I was not aware of the real nature of these evenings. Once I noticed that when one guest addressed another no reply was given ; conversation between the guests was therefore impossible. M. Henri de Régnier,

who on each occasion occupied the same seat in the corner at the host's right, was always silent. He seemed to be the guest of honour. Mallarmé frequently addressed his conversation to him, but M. de Régnier was not there to talk, but to listen ; instead of replying he simply took a few extra whiffs at his cigarette. Every one understood.

To a philosophical mind these evenings were so many lessons in the virtue of silence. No one tried to make the poet speak ; he himself never tried to make others speak. And yet these evenings were full of instruction and charm. Thought came as in a Quaker meeting, with this difference : Mallarmé was the presiding Quaker who never sat down. He occupied the floor by the will of the guests. Here one learned the true value of silence in affairs of the intellect. Everything that is made up for the occasion belongs to the puerile and the trivial. The talk imposed by self-interest and vanity is never edifying. If you wish to influence others be natural ; let Nature have a hand in your talk and your receptions.

Mallarmé owed much to his sojourn in England in his earlier years. Here he

entered into the spirit and substance of English poetry, and attained that extra something which he needed to embellish the exclusiveness and delicacy in his nature which later made him such an ardent admirer of Poe.

I saw Mallarmé alone on several occasions. "Poe," he remarked, on one of these visits, "I regard as an Irish genius transplanted to America."

"Hugo," I said, at another time, "advises writers never to dream."

"He is wrong," answered Mallarmé; "dreams have as much influence as actions."

And truth to say, this dreamer of dreams exercised a power seldom attained by any Frenchman before or during his day. Everything comes to him who seeks for nothing. The dreamer contents himself in a world of meditation and contemplation; his ideas are many, but his words are few. He dislikes action, yet he attracts the active. He seeks no réclames, yet he is acclaimed. In a study of Mallarmé and his salon, which appeared in 1892, I said: "In this poet we find a philosopher free from superstition and prejudice, a thinker who embraces all that is vital in art, music, and literature."

The best minds are often led into foolish acts, even against their better judgment; and the poet was inveigled into accepting a banquet in his honour, offered by a number of his admirers, at which conventional toasts, speeches, and responses, prearranged and machine-made, were the order of the evening. He was proclaimed "prince" of the young poets; but Mallarmé sat immovable, fatigued, and bored. It was no place for him.

When a wise man is placed in a ridiculous position, the fools, as Goethe says, have their innings. We blunder the moment we cease to reason and permit others to reason for us. Mallarmé, who was king in his own sphere, cut a poor figure at this banquet. In this attitude the poet descended to the arena of strife on a level with others of not half his merit who had dinners given in their honour.

How difficult it is to refuse at the right moment! The art of saying "No" is the supreme art in the life of every thinker. Of all things connected with the daily routine of a man of talent, this thing of knowing when and how to refuse is the simplest and most difficult. It is so easy to know and so hard to do. But until we learn to do it we can

expect nothing but misunderstanding and failure.

It was remarked by a journalist that Mallarmé, at this banquet, looked as if he had come to bury his last friend. And no wonder; for he had descended from his sanctuary in the Rue de Rome to a place where his star gave no light. He was attracted beyond his orbit by the comets and meteors of the phenomenal world, and he could say with Joseph Roux: "When I return from the country of men I take with me illusions and disillusiones."

ISABELLE DUCHESSE DE LA ROCHE-GUYON

•
NEVER in the history of France has the contrast between the old and the modern, the conservative and the democratic, been more clearly defined than during the past two decades. An abyss separated the conservative classes from the leaders of the Revolution and the followers of the First Empire. The guillotine and the sword had cut society into two sections.

With the Second Empire the old nobility became more reconciled to change and innovation. Slowly the nobles of the Faubourg Saint-Germain began to mingle with the nobility created by the two Napoleons. Then came the Third Republic, and a new element was added to society, which had now become a strange

medley of aristocratic preferences and democratic privileges. In Paris one now meets with members of the old nobility who are faithful republicans, democrats who would like to see a return of the Empire, and republican generals who would welcome a new Monarchy. But with all these conflicting ideas and sentiments certain sections of French society belong in spirit to the old régime. There are still a few families, a few groups and figures that remind one of the amiable dignity and inherent distinction which characterised the society of *le grand siècle*, when social leaders could show intellect without pedantry, wit without injustice, ardour without fanaticism. In that age social intercourse was regulated by sentiments which must have been inherent in the people. Between the things that can be attained by imitation and the things that are natural there must always be a striking difference.

About 1750 French society began to show more movement and agitation. The example set by Rousseau and the Encyclopædists had a marked effect on the literary salons of the time: the leaders of social intercourse be-

came more critical and at the same time more demonstrative. The eighteenth century revealed a new art of conversation. There was something audacious about the women who preceded the Revolution; they were the friends of philosophical innovators: Madame du Deffand corresponded with Voltaire, and Mesdames d'Epinay and d'Houdetot were influenced by Rousseau; but the women of the seventeenth century never departed from classical tradition. In religion they listened with admiration to Bossuet and Fénelon, in philosophy they discussed Montaigne and Pascal, in the drama they sided with Corneille or Racine, in the salons the wit and wisdom of La Rochefoucauld and Lafontaine gave point and tone to social intercourse. François I., who died in 1547, was a patron of art and letters. He set an example for Louis XIV., who ascended the throne one hundred years later, and it was not by chance that the Court at Versailles was glorified by a social and literary element the like of which the world has seldom seen.

The ascent of intellectual development, during this period, was gradual and all

pervading. The new society gave colour to politics, eloquence to religion, and character to conversation. The summit of progress was attained during the reign of Louis XIV. ; the descent began with the death of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld in 1680. Then came a long interval, during which society seemed to be living on the souvenirs of past glories. Under Louis XVI. a revival occurred, and women reigned once more in the salon ; but the literary salon was eclipsed by the Revolution, which was a man's affair.

There are certain poetic natures that live more in the past than in the present. There are others who are possessed by the present, who look to the spirit of modernity, who rush along without knowing why, who find it impossible to meditate, who have agitation and movement, who have no inherited feeling for the traditions and the customs of by-gone epochs. All unconsciously they bring with them unrest and disturbance, they are driven along with the popular current. Those who belong to another age while living in this are also unconscious of their exceptional position ; but, while living in the present, they are neither influenced nor agitated by

it. They seem to have whole centuries of authority to support them. They represent the last links in a long chain of refinement and intellectual culture. They are what they are without any effort.

There is among serious minds in France a love of the poetic in Nature which is hidden from the traveller who studies people and institutions from the exterior. An immense gap separates the boulevardier from the country gentleman, the world of amusement from the habits and tastes of the intellectual classes. Paris, to many people, means frivolity, agitation, and fashionable display, but, all things considered, I have never seen home life more attractive than it is in France. Whether in the country or in the city the French home has a peculiar charm; and with many families whose names are part of the history of the nation the one desire is to lead a quiet existence, at least one remove from the agitations of what is called Tout Paris.

Madame d'Houdetot, who lived till 1813, was called by Marmontel the Sévigné of Sannois; and the Duchesse Isabelle de La Roche-Guyon always makes me think of a

Sévigné of the present time. I have never sat in her company without feeling that I was in the presence of one who belonged to the society of Bossuet, Racine, Fénelon, Lafontaine, Mesdames de La Fayette and de Sévigné. The impression she produced on me at our first meeting, years ago, was not an illusion, as so many first impressions are. I found her the same at each subsequent visit, whether at her château or at her town-house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Sincerity marked every word and look. I was struck with the contrast between her presence and that of other women occupying a like social position. Her dress was of some dark material, and made in so simple a style that it attracted no attention. I saw at a glance that I was in the presence of a woman who belonged to the highest social rank without heeding its fashions. For the first time I had met a Frenchwoman with a great title who made one forget the title and think of the woman; she would have been just the same without the title. I had feared to be disillusioned once more by affected manners and absurd pretensions to literary tastes, but my doubts were dis-

pelled before Madame de La Roche-Guyon had taken her seat. I was certain that the woman sitting before me could not write what she did not feel; her work would be personal and sincere.

When she entered the room she seemed to bring with her the social atmosphere of the classical period; there was that carriage and personality which eludes the subtlest portraiture. It is easy to describe the eccentric, but how give an adequate impression of a person whose dress is of no particular fashion, whose voice is low, whose conversation is almost without a gesture, whose face denotes refinement without weakness, and character without egoism? The brush is required where the pen fails. But even the brush cannot give the movement of the body, the walk, which, in women, often means even more than speech. There was something about the walk of Madame de La Roche-Guyon which I had only seen once or twice in other women—a step that harmonised with the quality of her thought and sentiment, in which there was no haste, and above all no assumed dignity. Her slender figure moved with unconscious free-

dom. This woman could assume nothing that was not natural. She had put on nothing to make her look younger than her years. A woman who, upon her marriage with the Comte Alfred de La Rochefoucauld, afterwards Duc de La Roche-Guyon, had reigned in the world of beauty and fashion, she had not since the death of her youngest son given an hour's attention to the fashions and the pleasures of the world. I had expected conventional airs and formal phrases, egoism rising beyond the confines of social prerogative, something like *la folie des grandeurs*—the common Parisian disease of the time—and instead of these things I found in the author of *La Vie Sombre* a woman with the charm of Madame de Sévigné and the moral courage of Madame Ackermann.

"Ce qui distingue essentiellement Madame de Sévigné," says the critic, Suard, "c'est cette sensibilité momentanée qui s'emeut de tout, se répand sur tout, reçoit avec une rapidité extrême différens genre d'impressions." And the same may be said of Madame de La Roche-Guyon. Wherever I have met a womanly woman, who is also a

gifted woman, I have met with common sense and delicate thought, sincerity, and deep feeling. "Peu de gens sont dignes de comprendre ce que je sens," wrote Madame de Sévigné to her daughter; "j'ai cherché ceux qui sont de ce petit nombre, et j'ai évité les autres."

Things change only in appearance. If, during that epoch of wit and culture, few could understand Madame de Sévigné, it is no matter for wonder that Madame de La Roche-Guyon finds herself in a world which appears to her to be built on paradox. What renders her position particularly interesting is that Madame de La Roche-Guyon belongs by birth to the best society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. She was not placed in an awkward social position by her marriage with a son of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld; it changed nothing but her name. She knew the Faubourg as a native, others knew it as visitors; she had seen its interior, others its exterior; she knew its character, others its manners.

It is one thing to sit in a salon or a dining-room, look at people dressed in the latest fashions, see them smile and listen to gossipy

dialogues ; but it is another thing to see the same people in the privacy of their own homes, hear them confess their disillusion and their disappointments. A woman may appear amiable in company while her intimates may know her to be without heart. Society is a conspiracy ; a war between wit and manners, titles and talent, merit and mediocrity. All who enter it do so at the peril of equanimity and self-respect. We go into it with illusions which we leave at the door when we depart. If we could weigh our spiritual forces before mixing with a promiscuous company we should be able to realise how much it is possible to lose at the end of a stated time.

If conversation is an art, social selection is a psychological science. But poets prefer solitude to the din of promiscuous society ; and Madame de La Roche-Guyon has done her best work far from the madding crowd. There is in her poetry a quality that belongs to reflection and seclusion. She loves Nature as Lamartine and Wordsworth loved it.

My first visit to her château at Rochefort was in the month of September, and on going into the romantic woods belonging to it I

thought of Madame de Sévigné's words on her return to her home, in Brittany, in September 1675: "J'ai trouvé ces bois d'une beauté et d'une tristesse extraordinaire."

We were not much more than an hour from Paris, in a district containing some of the finest country seats in France; yet none were visible. Hill and forest hid the world from view; and the heather made one think of Scotland. It seemed as if the château, the oaks, the elms, the pines, had been there from time immemorial, and that nothing had been changed—a place enchanted by the souvenirs of warriors of eleven centuries ago, like Guy de La Rochefoucauld, and troubadours of the twelfth century, like Bernard de Born. And, strange to say, a few days later a tall, athletic young man arrived at the château with some friends from Paris for pheasant shooting. He was Comte Guy de La Rochefoucauld, a descendant of Guy, the mediæval chief of the tenth century.

I found it difficult to realise that we were so near Paris, and the châtelaine might well find inspiration in a place so serene and romantic. I could now fully enter into the spirit of her poetic moods, such as *Le*

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Parc, in the volume entitled *La Vie Sombre* :—

“ Bosquet ombreux, et vous, élégante charmille,
Tilleuls qui m’avez vue enfant, puis jeune fille,
Comment m’êtes-vous donc ainsi devenus chers ?
Qu’ai-je laissé de moi sous vos feuillages verts ?
D’où vient donc que par vous, tout émue, en silence
Je sens le souvenir me hanter, plus intense ?
Les fantômes aimés ici sont-ils errants ?
Parcourent-ils encore vos sentiers odorants ?
Frais abris ! seriez-vous tout imprégnés d’extase,
Ainsi que le parfum s’attache au bord du vase ? ”

Madame de La Roche-Guyon is a born interpreter of the beauties and the secret meanings of Nature. In *Amour des Champs* she expresses what all lovers of trees and streams have so often felt :—

“ Sourde aux bruits d’ici-bas, mon seul désir serait
D’aller m’anéantir au bord d’une rivière,
Entre les troncs tordus d’un vieux saule discret
Devenu philosophe en ce coin solitaire.”

The works of this poet contain a tenderness and a sadness which harmonise with the aspect of the hour and the season. Madame de La Roche-Guyon finds a poetic affinity in Lamartine ; she communes with Nature, the supreme refuge against the invading hordes of modern society. Her work is distinguished

by that delicacy and personal charm which distinguish the woman. In *La Vie Sombre* and *In Memoriam* the inspiration is one of heart as well as of intellect. In an exquisite lyric entitled '*Une Union*' there is a sentiment and grace which belong to a past age :—

“ Si vous étiez, ami, la Tige et moi la Rose,
 Vous, le Prince d'Avril, moi, la Dame de Mai,
 Sur vos feuillages verts j'appuierais mon front rose
 Autant que durerait le printemps parfumé.
 —Si vous étiez, ami, la Tige et moi la Rose.

Si j'étais la Pensée et vous, ami, le Son,
 Moi, l'Inspiration, vous, la douce Chanson,
 Nous passerions le soir de divines minutes,
 Uni par les soupirs des harpes et des flûtes.
 —Si j'étais la Pensée et vous, ami, le Son.

Si vous étiez la Joie et si j'étais la Peine,
 Reine de la Douleur, et vous, roi du Plaisir,
 Nous nous retrouverions sans cesse dans l'arène
 Où l'amour à nos pieds se verrait défaillir.
 —Si vous étiez la Joie et si j'étais la Peine.

Si vous étiez la Vie et si j'étais la Mort,
 Nous nous rencontrerions à chaque instant sur terre
 En attendant cette heure où tous les deux au port
 Nous dormirions sans fin dans l'étreinte dernière.
 —Si vous étiez la Vie et si j'étais la Mort ! ”

Madame de La Roche-Guyon has often spoken to me of Madame Ackermann, the Olympian pessimist, whom she knew person-

ally, the only woman whose verse could make that of Leopardi seem hopeful, beside whom Schopenhauer seems comforting and Nietzsche inspiring. M. d'Haussonville has called Madame Ackermann the Sappho of Atheism. "Not since Lucretius," he writes, "has absolute negation been rendered in lines of such beauty and grandeur."

It was Caro, of the French Academy, who "discovered" Madame Ackermann, and after his article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, introducing the author of *Poésies Philosophiques*, the questions on everyone's lips were: "Have you read Madame Ackermann's verses?" and "Who is Madame Ackermann?"

The new poet was depicted in imagination as young, beautiful, and romantic, not to say mysterious. It was difficult for people to believe that Madame Ackermann was sixty-one years of age at the time of her "discovery" by Caro, living an obscure life in the country, little dreaming or caring for publicity.

If her poems display a lofty and implacable pessimism, her views of life and conduct were no less inflexible. "The severity of my moral sentiments," she wrote, "is not a

logical result of my principles, but the immediate effect of my nature." Late in life Madame Ackermann made Paris her home, and became acquainted with Madame de La Roche-Guyon and some of her literary friends, including Monsieur and Madame Caro.

Madame Blanchecotte was another gifted friend of the Duchesse de La Roche-Guyon. One day I mounted the dark and narrow stairs which led to a Calvary on the topmost floor of an old house near the Pantheon. The winding stairs seemed to have no end, but at last I got to the top and was ushered into a small *appartement*, where everything that met the eye was in keeping with the physical and mental ordeals of the wonderful woman living there.

If Madame Ackermann was Olympian, Madame Blanchecotte was Promethean. It was evident from her face and figure that she was undergoing great and continual physical suffering, but when she began to speak the intellectual charm she exerted made one forget for a time her sad physical condition.

"You are sitting in the fauteuil where Victor Hugo and Lamartine often sat," she remarked. As she spoke the power of her intellect became more and more impressive.

Certain words assumed unlooked-for meanings. She talked of herself, not as a pessimist, but as one questioning and wondering. Then, in an outburst of eloquence, she tried to present a 'mental picture of her intellectual attitude, her aims, her inspiration, her anomalous position, her mental ordeals, her prolonged physical endurance, and she finished the wonderful sentence by the word "extraordinaire," uttered in syllables, with such deliberation and with such a gesture that the word assumed a transcendental meaning.

Seated in her chair, she had accomplished in the course of an ordinary conversation, by the use of the most ordinary words, a greater, more enduring wonder than I had ever witnessed in any drama enacted by Ristori or Duse. For the actress can only repeat what the poet has created, while here I witnessed a vital creation brought forth from the chaotic jumble of oral expressions in daily use into which the poet had infused all the meanings and mysteries of the world of fact, all the instincts, attributes, and incommensurable aspirations of the world of spirit.

Madame de La Roche-Guyon's mode of life when in Paris is much what it is in the country. At her town house one has the illusion of being in the country. The silence of the street, the rural appearance of the whole neighbourhood, the calm which reigns within, make it easy to imagine oneself in another age, and that age the one of Pascal and Bossuet. I never knew a woman so little deceived by the shows, vanities, and pretensions of the great world in which she has always lived. She is not a dreamer who has given no thought to modern social problems. She knows Paris and its absurd extremes in politics and social fads:—

“Ce que mon esprit trouve ici de plus étrange,
C'est l'agitation si folle des humains :
Jamais calmes, courant vers les pays lointains,
Se détestant à l'aise et quêtant la louange.”

She looks at everything about her from a point of view which is personal:—

“Et cependant partout l'homme à l'homme est pareil :
Mêmes masques toujours couvrent mêmes visages,
Mêmes comédiens ont un même soleil,
Car le Réel n'est pas quelque vague doctrine :
Toutes les passions restent les passions ;
L'humanité nest qu'une : ici, là-bas, en Chine,
Enfantant un héros contre mille histrions.”

The difference between one country and another lies in the outward and the apparent; ambition and vanity in France are the same as in England. The deception lies in the illusions of the outward and visible show; the heart of man is the same everywhere. Madame de La Roche-Guyon judges society, not as it seems, but as it is. She rises superior to it while living in it. This is what all gifted minds attempt, but not all succeed in doing.

The Duchesse Isabelle de La Roche-Guyon's life is in keeping with her literary sentiments, and to live unaffected by the social and political changes of the past, as well as the present, has been her privilege.

LAMARTINE

- “ *Le secret du génie d'un grand homme est le plus souvent dans son cœur.*”—LAMARTINE.

LITERARY charm is like a philter distilled by the heart and dispensed by the intellect. When I meet with a book that keeps me from my work hours at a time, uniting reality and reverie by a sort of magical bond, I know then that I have met with a poetic personality in the highest meaning of the phrase. Books are like people; we prefer those that attain our own level of thought and feeling; and we often find congenial books and people in the places where we least expect them—where we look for fashion in place of intellect, pretension in place of sincerity. Who has not met with at least one congenial spirit on some occasion when boredom seemed

inevitable? Who has not been disillusioned at least once by accepting an invitation to meet a room full of fashionable people, many of them posing as artists, philosophers, and poets? Who has ever got the exact thing sought for at the beginning?

I had long been familiar with the name of Lamartine, without knowing much of his work. The friend who presented me to Alexandre Dumas was never tired of pronouncing Lamartine's name, for the poet died in the very year of my arrival in Paris. But I am now convinced that we can learn more from a man's writings in prose than we can from his poems. Victor Hugo belongs to the world of dramatic action, but Lamartine takes possession of the soul; the charm is vital, the influence cordial and penetrating. A great noise accompanied the life and work of Hugo, but Lamartine belonged to the Virgilian order. A man becomes noted for his wit, but this poet is distinguished by the quality of his soul.

One has only to think of Virgil and Dante, without naming a hundred others, to accept Lamartine's dictum that, "The soul is the principle of all lasting glory." Such natures

never change. Troubles and sorrows, instead of making them more worldly, make them more at one with themselves. The greater the noise of rival factions all about them, the more patience do they possess. Wit and action, in themselves, amount to nothing. "The human heart can invent nothing, though it can feel everything: it is anguish, piety, love, death, which render it harmonious." In an age when realism and mammon are believed in by millions of people it is well to have such a thought as the following often repeated to those who put their faith in smartness, machine-made education, and the "isms" of the multitude: "It is through the soul that thought has feeling. The soul alone gives life, because it alone can feel." And here is one for the meditation of people who dream of becoming artists and poets by simply wishing and trying: "All great passions are prodigies; they can only be measured by themselves. The impossible is their measure."

In Amiel the poet was crushed by the thinker, but in Lamartine the philosopher was as great as the poet. He was a man

of action withal, but he would have been just as great without having taken any part in politics. It requires something more than effective versifying to give utterance to a thought like this: "There is a mysterious analogy between the breadth of ideas and the breadth of horizons." And Amiel or Chateaubriand might have written this: "There are sites, climates, seasons, hours, exterior circumstances, so much in harmony with certain expressions of the heart that Nature seems to be part of the soul and the soul part of Nature."

It requires a thinker who is not an intellectual mannikin to express such sentiments, to put them into simple language, and to give others a clear impression of the writer's feelings. This communion with Nature is rarely experienced by youth, which is hurried along at too rapid a pace to observe and appropriate the ensembles of wood and stream, shadow and sunshine. This is why the philosopher must develop before the artist can occupy the vantage ground of the seer. In youth we are struck by mere appearances. We are held by the pure illusions of sight and sense. In middle-age

we begin to feel ourselves a part of the things we see. The supreme meditative mood is identical with Nature.

After a whole age of experience we begin to realise with the poet-philosopher that, "The human heart, and Nature, alone, are of a universal allurement (attraction), which renews itself through all ages."

It is impossible for anyone who is absorbed in the schools and "isms" of the time to properly appreciate this: "Every time that man prepares himself worthily to speak to God, he feels the necessity of placing himself face to face with Nature." This thought, if we dwell on it long enough, will explain the attitude of people who think they find enlightenment in the foibles and superstitions of certain modern beliefs. Looked at closely, some of the new "isms," instead of leading the mind to a contemplation of the realities, lead it away from the Supreme power of the universe into the trivial and the purely personal. Instead of bringing us face to face with the mystical unity of Nature and man, they separate them, and turn man into a trivial machine divorced from all communion with eternal realities. "The

passion to admire renders everything comprehensible."

There is no admiration inspired by the sight of human automatons, no matter what they may do or say. Nothing that is said or done mechanically will have any durable influence on the minds of thinking people.

Lamartine was the one clairvoyant statesman of his time ; yet, in 1848, he addressed the people from the Hôtel de Ville with this outburst of Utopian fraternity: "Embrassons-nous, aimons-nous, fraternisons comme une seule famille de condition à condition, de classe à classe, d'opulence à indigence." But he was brushed aside, a few years later, by Napoleon's Coup d'Etat, and lived till 1869, neglected by the people in power who had risen from the ranks of the incompetent and obscure. Had Lamartine lived a few months longer he might have seen Napoleon hurrying across fields of carnage in his efforts to elude the mandates of destiny; members of his household escaping furtively from the back-doors of the Tuileries, veiled, disguised, assisted by the despised of society ; and in Paris he would certainly have witnessed the rout of titled usurpers by the

intellectual autocrat, Bismarck, on one side, aided by the proletarian demagogues and the *sans-culottes* of Paris, on the other.

Wherever ambition and vanity obscure the light of intellect and wisdom, ruin and chaos are the result. Indeed, incompetent rulers are attacked by two opposite, inimical forces : the gifted, who can see, and the fanatics, who are blind.

* Lamartine's experience is but another lesson to be added to those which history has sent down from the Revolution of '89. It is commonly supposed that we are better judges of the events of the French Revolution than the writers of culture who took a part in it. This is a grave error. No writer can describe adequately what he has not seen and felt. Modern historians do not give us the movement, the manner, the swift gesture, the hissing voice, the flashes of rage in the bloodshot eye of the man-tiger liberated by chaos from the bars of social durance, and landed at one bound in the arena of mortal strife ; they fail to impart the rush of blood to the sallow cheeks of covetousness, the sudden change from purple to pallor as the intriguing factions sway to and fro under the lash of the

Girondists, or rise to oratorical violence under the exaltation of the Mountain; they fail to depict the malady known as "la folie des grandeurs," in its varying guises of sophistry and patriotic cant, in its hallucination of power unattainable, talent never to be acquired, ambitions never to be realised. They cannot see in imagination what they never saw in the body.

A phrase from Mirabeau, a page from Chamfort, a portrait from Chateaubriand, come to us as the judgment of men who experienced the fatal fascination and the horror of a conflict between genius and an assemblage of weak minds made furious by the expectation of spoil and sanguinary conflict. Bonaparte, who used Republicans and Communists alike in his ascent to the throne, was never afterwards free from the influence of the populace. After his coronation every victory gained was a fresh weight in the scale descending towards calamity. Similarly, Napoleon III., who mounted the throne after it had been occupied by three kings in succession, had no direct rights and no legitimate expectations. Once more history was repeated: he came into power

through a democratic revolution which banished Louis-Philippe, and gave the new emperor an opportunity of using the new democracy. Placed on the throne by demagogues, he was urged into impossible schemes by ambitious adventurers, and by his own vanity into acts of political and social rivalry. The Crimean War was a blunder, the invasion of Mexico a crime, the war with Germany an act of madness.

The experience of Lamartine stands as another warning. Never under existing conditions will the masses be made to realise the distinction between social rights and intellectual privileges. The typical lady's-maid, who reads sensational novels and goes out on Sunday wearing a dress cut in the latest fashion, has every right, under the present system of education, to believe that a rich marriage would make her the equal of the most cultured women in the land. She can see but one step between her position and that of her mistress: the step which is made of gold; and the accident of marriage might at any time place this step within her reach. With the ignorant young woman, as with the ignorant young man,

there is no such thing as intellect. The question of existence is a question of possession. For the lady's-maid, the valet, the cook, and the coachman are all familiar with the very things which interest the master and the mistress: they have witnessed the same problem plays, read the same problem-novels in cheap editions; they know the ways of the modern money-kings, the intrigues of society leaders, and the ambitions of parvenus. They know the significance of all these words, signs, and symbols, which, forty years ago, appeared to the understanding of the people as so much Greek.

Maxims about the equality created by opportunity are now a stock-in-trade in kitchen, workshop, and counting-house. The demoralising notion that all men are created equal has been doing its work ever since the French Revolution. Science is just beginning to unravel the tangle of errors created by this doctrine.

There are but two standards by which to judge of man: physical strength and mental ability. Taken on the plane of simple brute force, the man with the greatest physical power is everywhere considered the best man ;

he is considered superior by the illiterate masses as well as by competent judges of the prize-ring. Here, in this world of sound health and herculean muscle, the palm of superiority is accorded the victor by universal acclamation. The savage and the scientist, therefore, admit that all men are not born physically equal. Taken on the plane of pure intellect, man is everywhere unequal. •The street-sweeper has over him someone who is a little too good to sweep the streets ; the bricklayer the builder ; the builder the architect. It is therefore admitted on all sides that the architect knows more than the workmen under him.

We cannot look about us anywhere without being struck with the physical and mental inequality of men and things. It is hardly possible to find three persons with an equal physical development, and it would be something like a miracle to meet with a group of persons with mental characteristics developed on parallel lines. Why, then, in the face of these inexorable laws, the force of which a savage is willing to admit, do people continue to preach the doctrine of equality? There are two reasons : lack of

discernment and lack of scientific knowledge. But the initial reasons are the same as those which caused the American and French Revolutions : the vanity and excesses of the nobility, and the hate and fear inspired by ignorant law-makers ; and, above all, the envy inspired by the arrogance and ostentation of the French nobles, from the reign of Louis XIV. to 1789.

Perhaps the most striking thing in the life of the poet-statesman is the fact that he was one of Nature's aristocrats who spent his best forces in the cause of a blind, wilful, and passionate people. Well may he write : " Oh, humanity ! To what depths can you not descend when the spirit of utopia excludes the spirit of common-sense." The mob feared the presence of a good man in 1849 as they feared and hated Mirabeau in 1789. In 1793 they fed the guillotine with the talent and genius of France. The rabble went free until the wheel of destiny began to revolve the other way ; then the *sans-culottes* of the Mountain tasted their own blood by a process of their own invention.

Lamartine had to learn the lesson learnt by all the poets and philosophers since the

beginning of history. All had to learn it to their sorrow. Goethe, the wisest mind of the nineteenth century, puts the lesson in these words: "I certainly advise you not to waste an hour in the society of men whose tastes and concerns have nothing in common with your own."

The subject of genius descending to the rabble is a fascinating one. Men who live and soar in the region of light and wisdom are never at home in crowds. A mob belongs to itself. The forces proper for the control and domination of crowds are those of will and reason, in which poetic inspiration is out of place. The poet blundered when he left his own world and descended to the ranks of the ordinary politician; and poets pay as much for their blunders as the rest of us, perhaps more—for the poet is a sensitive who feels the influence of people and things more acutely than others. We all blunder in thinking that we can succeed where others have failed. There is but one law for poets, artists, and thinkers, and that law warns everyone against the folly of descending to a plane on which Nature never intended the man of thought

to dwell. But to succeed in living the life which Nature intended us to live requires a patience which has no end. The moment we lose patience we lose self-control, and trouble begins. Lamartine, like hundreds of others, imagined he could influence the crowd as he influenced poets and thinkers. The two worlds can never be made to mingle as one. Come what may, the soul will remain detached from the noises of the world. Neither politics, nor religion, nor science, will ever succeed in changing Nature's mandates. And the charm which we find in certain books, scenes, and people will never diminish or change with the novelties and fashions of time.

LECONTE DE LISLE

•WITHOUT the cosmopolitan innovations of the Second Empire literary society in Paris would have remained more or less provincial to this day. The Paris of Napoleon attracted beautiful women without talent, witty women without beauty, and gifted women with the fascination of genius. Napoleon may or may not have governed France, but I am certain that Paris under the Second Empire was governed by women. It was the women of Napoleon's Court who set the fashions in everything. They brought to Paris a strange, new, and conquering element, a new order of ideas, and a cosmopolitan outlook on life which was nothing short of a revelation to the old conservative aristocracy of the Faubourg St Germain.

The Second Empire was a woman's world,

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and the poets, artists, and musicians who were not appreciated by women fared badly indeed. But already during the reign of Louis Philippe women were proving to be the rivals of men ; the only rival to Georges Sand was Victor Hugo, and it was the women who acclaimed him at the very beginning of his career. Alfred de Musset was a woman's poet and Chopin a woman's composer. The great romantic movement of 1830 swept classicism from the field of the arts, and in spite of a citizen King the movement brought with it a romantic sentimentalism previously unknown in Europe.

The Revolution of 1848 changed nothing but the entourage of the Tuileries. When Louis Napoleon became Emperor, writers, artists, composers continued much in the way they had begun at the opening of the new era ; the Napoleonic Court brought together a galaxy of women from the four quarters of Continental Europe such as the modern world had never known ; and in much of the poetry, the literature, and the music of the time the sentimental got the upper hand.

Where Chateaubriand displayed an im-

peccable mastery over sentiment, never letting it lapse into sentimentality, Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Georges Sand, were lavishly sentimental, and their failings helped to make them popular. The music of Chopin, Auber (the most typical of French composers), and Ambroise Thomas showed the same characteristics. All who did not succumb to the popular weakness had to wage continuous battles with poverty. Berlioz, the greatest of French composers, died before his music had triumphed over the sentimental opposition; while Flaubert, who was writing for lovers of pure literature, fought the same hostile element until the day of his death. But why was Chateaubriand so popular? Chateaubriand became popular through his early stories. They were the sentimental bleatings of a poetic kid in the literary wilderness created by the French Revolution. In the *Mémoires d'outre Tombe* he ceased to be sentimental, but retained all the emotional qualities of his unique genius. His style, like that of Flaubert, was the outcome of poetic sentiment controlled by art, and freed from errors of taste and impulse.

Hugo, who declared when a mere child that he would be a second Chateaubriand or nothing, never attained the Virgilian charm of the master. Hugo was often moved by impulse and passion, mortal enemies of style; and, like Georges Sand, he was swayed and influenced by all kinds of whims and illusions. He sometimes mistook impulse for inspiration and passion for art. This form of genius succeeds because of its manifold aspects. It offers something to every temperament, and we skip what we do not like.

Now, there was one poet who walked alone, choosing a solitary road, one who admired Hugo without trying to imitate the colossus, a poet who determined to discard the sentimental and write with marmoreal impassibility. This was Leconte de Lisle, the author of *Poèmes Antiques* and *Poèmes Barbares*. But in discarding the sentimental he also discarded sentiment. It was a fatal blunder. Many women who read Hugo and Alfred de Musset with pleasure did not even know the name of this poet, when, middle-aged, the young Parnassians of the new school selected him as their leader.

It was Catulle Mendès who first led the new school, but not having the genius to maintain such a position he proposed Leconte de Lisle as a *pontife honoraire* of the movement; and just at the beginning, and in the nick of time, some wag gave them the title of the "Impassibles," and the school became a thing of reality. Unfortunately, in art, serenity and impassibility do not mean the same thing. Mallarmé and Sully Prudhomme, both members of the Parnassian group, were calm and patient as thinkers and artists, but not impassible as poets, and the same may be said of Coppée and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, two other Parnassians.

Poetry and stoicism are antipathetic; and Leconte de Lisle found by the time the Second Empire had finished and the third Republic had arrived that he had tried in vain to rid himself of passion, utopian dreams, and sectional prejudice. As a republican he hated the Empire. The serious reading public did not buy his works, and he might have starved had not the Empire accorded him a pension. But that was not all; when the Republic arrived he lost his pension and

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was ignored by the Republic. At this critical moment François Coppée came to the aid of the Parnassian leader. Coppée resigned his position as *sous-bibliothécaire* at the Palais du Luxembourg in favour of Leconte de Lisle.

A French critic has said of this poet's work: "One cannot cite a single line created by enthusiasm." The truth is, the author of the *Poèmes Antiques* was a mere figure-head, as a leader, seeing that neither Mallarmé nor Sully Prudhomme nor Coppée, to say nothing of Verlaine, ever followed his methods. It was Baudelaire who, in praising the work of Leconte de Lisle, remarked that the contempt he felt for the Empire and the public generally was so "tranquil" that he did not even give himself the trouble to express it. It would have been interesting and instructive to have learned from the poet himself what he thought of the Republic which ignored his existence. All eloquence is but wind when it consists in emotions without a message for anyone. Had he been gifted with vision, had he been gifted even with a ray of the prophetic, he would have seen what was coming for art and literature under

the Republic ; and he would have been contented with the Empire.

"You are going to see a man who is as cold as his poetry," said the Princess Metshersky, as we drove from her villa at Passy to the residence of Leconte de Lisle in the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

- The Princess was the translator of Shelley's *Cenci*, and an intimate friend of Victor Hugo. She urged me to accompany her on this occasion ; but I must say I did so without any desire to meet the host.

The *appartement* of the poet was of ordinary size. A French writer has described the salon as "classic," that is to say, it was furnished with palissander and grey rep, with *fauteuils administratifs* in green velvet, and other bourgeois symbols. Over the mantel there was a bust of the poet, which served to heighten the cold and uninviting aspect of the salon. No one loves the "classics" more than I do, but I draw a line at classical rooms and classical furniture. In this matter I am a Goth. Paul Bourget has said that, "When you have seen

the salon in one Parisian mansion you have seen five hundred."

Leconte de Lisle had the air and mien of a clean-shaven pedantic professor: stiff lips, hard, grey eyes, and an eye-glass to match the presumed stoicism and apparent cynicism. He might have been a combination of a surgeon-general and a cavalry colonel, fit for a cavalry raid, but unacquainted with the arts, the capers, and the flights of Pegasus; and the more I saw of him the more I wondered what could have induced such a man to occupy himself with poetry. Never had I seen such a head on the body of a professed poet. "The style is the man," I thought to myself as I studied this incongruous, contradictory, paradoxical personality.

In one corner of the salon sat Mlle. Judith Gautier, a plain-looking woman without the genius of her celebrated father. She was surrounded by women, among whom was Madame Leconte de Lisle. This group never moved. The host was busy with the manuscript of some young poet who needed advice. He passed to and fro through the room with sheets of paper in his

hand, and with an expression on his face that said: "You see what a serious business it is—no time to talk, no time for anything but correcting the poetry of all these young poets who will some day be academicians, *grâce à moi.*"

In the dining-room, José de Hérédia, Henri de Regnier, and one or two others whom I knew, were standing about, smoking cigarettes, looking extremely bored. What a contrast between this place and Mallarmé's little room! Academical honours spoil some people, just as titles of nobility spoil others, and too much success others.

In a man like Leconte de Lisle there is something *orgueilleux*, vain, and self-conscious. Such a mixture in a man of talent produces a state of nervous irritability which often ends in mental disorder; and it was evident that the poet believed himself indispensable to the Parisian, if not to the whole literary world.

At the salon of the Comtesse Diane there was the saving grace of wit, humour, and vivacity. Leconte de Lisle, old as he was, had not learned, and would never learn, the art of social intercourse. His egotism grew

with every new honour, and I remember his rage at something Paul Bourget said of his poetry. He challenged Bourget to a duel, but the latter wrote a letter saying he would do nothing so absurd, seeing^a that he (M. Bourget) was a young man and Leconte de Lisle was an old one. "And besides," said the novelist, "I have a great admiration for the gifts of Leconte de Lisle." But the idea of an academician challenging a writer like Paul Bourget for some trivial criticism showed the state of the poet's mind.

For so distinguished a man Leconte de Lisle was the greatest social failure I ever met in Paris. I tried to fathom the cause of this failure. He was born on an island of the Indian Ocean, and was doubtless an incurable provincial long before he came to Paris. There was doubtless something lacking in his early education; and, lastly, he was born with a haughty and overbearing disposition.

The sociability and tact of a man may be judged by the way in which he lets sectional notions and habits slip from him when he comes to live in a great centre of intellectual culture. A provincial frame of

mind is fatal to social intercourse. Leconte de Lisle, in coming to Paris, expected people to conform to his notions of how things should be done. He came with a little world of his own illusions, expecting the central minds of the Capital to adjust themselves to his methods and ways.

The sentiment and manners of intellectual Paris are like adamantine fixtures, and refuse to ebb and flow with the arrival of every new writer or school of writers. Leconte de Lisle's literary evenings were failures because he could not attain the "centre." He was elected a member of the Académie because Frenchmen do make an effort to be just in literary matters; but the personality of the man had no real weight on contemporary thought. This explained the attitude of Mlle. Judith Gautier, sitting in a corner surrounded by persons of her own sex. The host, she knew, counted for nothing. He had not, like Mallarmé, a literary court of his own; and she, clever lady, could and did hold one of her own in her little corner. I was greatly amused when I thought of the strategical position occupied by Mlle. Gautier. With her back to a corner, no

one, man or woman, could take up a position behind her. Two or three of her lady admirers sitting before her would be joined by others, and a half-circle was thus formed through which no man could hope to penetrate without the aid of shot and shell.

I saw here, as in so many other places, the folly of bringing all sorts of people together and calling the crowd "literary." Nearly all so-called literary receptions, in our day, are failures. Conversation in a mixed crowd is not possible. A crowd begins to form when the number of persons present exceeds ten. The host and hostess and yourself make three; you have then to admit of seven others. Be you poet, philosopher, artist, or musician, you will know how to get along with that number and judge each stranger separately, and finally decide whether you wish to meet any of them again.

But if you wish for success, even with the small number of ten, you will have to set your wits to work and draw up a list of persons whom you know will harmonise with the general aim and purpose of your evening. If you are wise you will invite

no one with a mania for discussion. If you are very wise you will not invite two artists, or poets, or novelists, or actors.

Leconte de Lisle's salon proved that there was in Paris an element of decadence in the literary world which could not be ignored. Could such a salon have existed under Louis Philippe? Madame Adam said to me one day, "It is the fault of the Empire." But why place vicious thinking and ill-breeding at the door of the Empire? On the contrary, all the trouble started with Voltaire. Brilliant and witty, Voltaire destroyed much but erected nothing. He made cynicism popular. In no sense was he creative. The cynic never creates anything. It is true that under the Empire there was a scramble for place and favour; and audacity, once more, as during the Revolution, became the order of the day.

When, at last, the balloon of Empire burst at Sedan disillusion and disgust became general. The expression of worldly pleasure and material contentment so common on the faces of the people now changed to one of pain, distrust, and jealous rage. French suavity and politeness gave way to brusque-

ness and egoism, and the dry stalks of intellectuality rose into prominence with old men like Leconte de Lisle and young ones like Guy de Maupassant, men whose souls were compressed in the general shrinkage of sentiment and solidarity. Zola wrote materialistic novels, and the Goncourts kept a cynical diary. But the love of display grew apace. National misfortune did not kill ridiculous vanities. All that was vulgar under the Empire was kept alive under new names. Display and pretension expanded with the Republic. Everyone now had a salon. Men like Leconte de Lisle received, and left their guests to sit or stand like the figure on the monument, regardless of time, grief, or the state of the weather. Guy de Maupassant installed himself in a luxurious home in a fashionable part of Paris, and at last died, a young man, with a disease that might have been diagnosed as the fatty degeneration of heartlessness. Everyone found the means of receiving, but very few the means of entertaining and edifying.

Many of the writers who have no salon may be classed as cynics pure and simple—cynics who have passed beyond the saving

graces of innocent vanity and approbateness. A fierce struggle for a prominent place before the eye of the public has been going on in Paris for the past twenty years. So blinded have some writers become to the sense of ridicule that I know more than one academician who would not object to taking part in a bull-fight were it not for the grave risk to scalp and skin which that entertainment would be certain to provoke. Leconte de Lisle, for example, created great amusement by challenging M. Bourget ; but the poet was unconscious of a sense of ridicule. So, too, he was unconscious of any farcical design in expecting his guests to sit staring at one another.

There can now be no mistake about the intellectual life of Paris under Louis Napoleon. With the break up of the Empire the charm of the wonderful, romantic movement was broken. Whatever the Empire may have been it was not bourgeois. It was an epoch of brilliant women and gifted men. The Republic brought with it the reign of the commonplace, political salons, scientific realism, a school of hydrocephalic and colour-blind artists, and a decadent school of

symbolism. The brilliant and witty women are gone, and in their place we have dollar duchesses and pinchbeck princesses, women who have not been "called" to Paris, but who have pushed themselves* in by sheer perseverance and aplomb, who pay for getting their names into Society journals. Without cultured women Society is a rabble.

The leading women of Paris during the Empire were not adventuresses, as some good people have supposed. The beautiful Duchesse de Morny was a Russian aristocrat; the Princess Mathilde was a Bonaparte, and had a salon the like of which no longer exists anywhere; the Empress was an aristocratic Spaniard; and the witty Princess Metternich, whose culture was only rivalled by that of Madame Viardot-Garcia and Georges Sand, was the wife of the Austrian Ambassador, whose residence was like a Royal Court, and whose receptions were the envy of the whole diplomatic world.

PRINCESS HELENE RACOWITZA

DURING one of my sojourns in Munich, while sitting in the salon of a friend, in the Leopoldstrasse, a visitor was announced. She was clad in black, and I could hardly distinguish her features owing to the dim light of a winter's afternoon. The lady was Helene von Dönniges, Princess Racowitza. I did not know the name, and I was no wiser than I was before; but on taking a seat near enough to engage in the conversation, I was instantly struck with her beauty and her charm. Her presence gave the illusion of a room full of witty and cultured women; and although her conversation disclosed a mind of the highest intelligence, there was nothing of the masculine to be noticed in her looks or her manner; she was

a woman with a womanly charm, and a distinction which even the most unobserving could not fail to notice.

We talked for an hour, my interest increasing as she mentioned name after name of persons I knew or had known in different capitals of the world. We talked of friends in Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna. Writers, artists, and composers had sought her for her marvellous beauty ; and some evenings later, when I saw her in evening dress at her own home, I seemed to be in a place where the rarest flowers were growing, especially roses of the most delicate tints, for her presence suggested an atmosphere of flowers.

There are two kinds of personal beauty. One is physical, and has nothing to do with intellectuality ; the other is inseparable from culture ; and after knowing the Princess Helene Racowitza I could better understand the rôle beautiful women have so often played in the world of politics everywhere. I was not surprised when I learned that Bismarck had tried very hard to engage the Princess to go to Paris as a German spy at the Court of Napoleon. Bismarck had sent Colonel H. von B., an officer of the

General Staff, to see her many times. Everything possible was done to induce her to accept the situation ; there were promises of a brilliant life at Paris, with costly dresses, with every luxury ; but the friend of Lassalle always refused, saying that she had not yet learned how to lie, and she had no inclination whatever to begin to learn. When at last the Colonel sent in his report to Bismarck the latter endorsed it : " Very good ! but it is the report of a *Primaner* in love, not that of a serious officer of the General Staff."

I am not so much interested in Bismarck as I am in the writers and artists, creative magicians of the art-world, whom this remarkable woman knew as intimate friends, and who sought her company, not on any pretext of idle curiosity or to pass an evening gossiping, but as a source of inspiration in their work.

The celebrated Hans Makart, when a mere youth and quite unknown, once stopped the Princess on the street in Munich, without knowing who she was, and begged her to let him paint her portrait. He said to himself : " If I could paint that head it would make me famous at one stroke " ; but

he was taken for a madman and sent away. It was Franz von Lenbach who, eight years after this incident, brought Makart and the Princess Racowitza together at Vienna. Lenbach had already painted a portrait of the head that was turning so many other heads, besides inspiring so many artists, and now Makart was to have his desire satisfied.

There was at that time in Vienna a group of brilliant and gifted people, among whom were Toni Hiller, the daughter of my old friend, Ferdinand Hiller, the director of the Cologne Conservatorium of Musique, Auguste Bandius, and Charlotte Wolter. Hans Makart, besides being an artist, was a genius. He said he "saw colours with his soul." While other painters were trying to get the exact colour he dashed it off at one effort. Makart had in his atelier an old Italian cabinet, in which there was always some loose money. He called it the comrades' money, the common property of all. Who ever needed money went to the cabinet, and if it were "high tide" he took what sum was needed; if it were "low tide" a complaint would be made to the master, who would say: "Never mind, Helene must be painted

again; the art dealers buy all my Venetian ladies and studies of heads wet from the easel, so I'll paint to-morrow, and we shall all have enough once more." In this way Helene Racowitza sat again for the benefit of everyone.

One day Makart was at work, the Princess sitting for a Venetian Dogaressa in a gorgeous costume, the gown of which was of gold brocade and scarlet and sea-green velvet, with a cap and crown of the period, her hair like a golden flame amidst the splendid colours, when Lenbach, who had his studio next to that of Makart, rushed in and cried out: "Hans, leave off work! Liszt and his friend, the Countess Dönhoff, and a number of others are with me, and are just coming in to see you."

Makart was exasperated. He did not want to leave his fascinating task, and refused; but Lenbach said: "You can't help it; they are coming, here they are," and in popped the Abbé Liszt, followed by the Countess Dönhoff and the others, but not before the Princess Racowitza had time to hide in a niche under the big window which Makart had hidden with palms and flowers.

Here she watched the party, and heard the exclamations of delight in German, French, and Hungarian, while Makart did his best to divert their attention to other parts of the studio. At last they left. The Princess emerged from her hiding place; but at that moment Liszt, who wished to say something to Makart, came back, and, discovering the beautiful Dogaressa, cried out, "Who is this?" Lenbach tried his best to induce Liszt to go, and said, "The Countess is waiting."

"Let her wait," was the curt answer from the dare-devil Abbé, and, turning to the Princess, he added, "Who are you, and why have we never met before?" After some explanations he asked Lenbach to keep the Dönhoff and the others away from the studio; then he said to Makart, "You want to paint this picture here? I tell you it is impossible. You will never be able to do it. Show me what you have painted." On seeing the canvas Liszt shook his long hair, and said with diabolical aplomb, "No, that won't do; but have you ever heard me play?"

"Yes," answered the Princess, "once at

my parents' house and yesterday at the concert."

"Then," said Liszt, "you have not heard me, for at that time you were too young, and in the concerts I am néver myself. Well, Makart, to-morrow evening I am coming here to you, and then I will play, there on that piano, for this woman."

And so it was. Liszt came and played, and conquered, as he always did. Those were the days when pianists seemed to be without rivals. They were greater than princes. No general in all Germany attracted so much attention as Liszt in the 'fifties and 'sixties. His word was law. In certain towns people ceased work on the day of his visit. Duchesses scrambled for the bits when he broke a wine-glass, and all our pianists and fiddlers of the present rolled into one could not influence the world of art and fashion as he did at that time.

• It seems that writers and artists can be fat and distinguished, but there is an unwritten law forbidding pianists to grow stout and remain fashionable. As soon as Liszt grew stout he lost his vogue. His influence lay in his personal appearance, aided by his

talent, which was not great enough to be creative.

In Paris, Helene Racowitza sat to Carpeaux, the famous sculptor, who used the model for his "Genius of Daring," in the fine group on the Paris Opera House, a group which I particularly remarked at the time the Opera House was finished. In Paris the Princess also sat for Henner, at that time one of the great portrait painters of the day, and who declared that the exact colour of her hair could not possibly be reproduced in painting. It was Henner who painted a fine head of my friend the witty Comtesse Diane, whose hair was more of a red, and much less difficult to paint.

Everywhere the beauty of Helene von Dönniges, Princess Racowitza, produced a never-to-be-forgotten impression.

PAULINE VIARDOT-GARCIA

• GREAT dramatic singers are rarer than great actors. Many singers gifted with beautiful voices cannot act ; some are effective in repose, but they cannot move about the stage with dignity ; others are great in ensembles, but find it impossible to enact a tragic scene with another artiste ; while many are impressive in attitude and gesture, but cannot modulate the voice. It would be easy to fill columns with the imperfections of many of our most successful lyrical artistes.

It is not difficult for a singer with a powerful voice to shout through an act in Wagner ; it is a matter of declamation, but declamation is not singing. It is infinitely more difficult to combine fine vocal art with physical power and dignified gesture. The decadence of vocal art arrived with Wagner, who did not

understand the "art of singing." He demanded physical power. The great duet in *Tristan and Isolde* demands the lung power of a bellows to carry it to the end with success. Materna, who was no artiste, was considered a great singer because of her powerful voice until the advent of Kinder-Reichmann, when Materna was forgotten. The truth is that in many of Wagner's leading rôles it is a human machine that is needed to give the proper steam-propelling effect to the music and the situation.

As for Wagner's tenor rôles, I never heard a tenor in one of them, not even at Bayreuth, that was not an ear-splitting affliction; and between Wagner's works and the old Italian operas I can distinguish no difference in the amount of pain inflicted on the lover of real music, and for this reason: the long declamatory scenes in Wagner and the efforts of the singers to attain certain notes and produce certain effects are as painful to the ears of a music lover as the humdrum marches in *Norma* and *Faust*, the popular song of the tenor in *Riggoletto*, and dozens of other banalities of a like order. To sit out a typical Italian opera is not a bit worse than

to sit out *Parsifal* or a portion of the *Ring*. But Wagner, taken in steady doses, often produces fatal results. Once, after having spent the whole summer at Bayreuth and having witnessed all the performances at the Wagner Theatre, I fell ill, not from any results produced on my nerves by Wagner's music, but from indiscretion in eating. I went from Bayreuth to Meran, where I placed myself under the care of one of the best German physicians. When he heard that I had attended a Wagner Festival he exclaimed, with a look of pity, "Ach Gott! I have many such cases; Wagner's music! How terrible! Only the doctors know what it does!" I could not help smiling, for I did not believe a word of all this. But I grew wiser. At one time, during the climax of the Wagner fever, many cases of insanity occurred from the study of Wagnerian rôles. Angelo Neumann, in his admirable book *Personal Recollections of Richard Wagner*, mentions the sad case of Emil Scaria, perhaps the greatest Wotan ever heard, and describes how he had to be led from the stage, in a Wagner performance at Vienna, having lost his reason.

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It is the straining after effect, the fruitless search for the correct pose, the exact intonation, the feeling and the intention of the master that produce the worry and the insanity. In Italian opera the art is simple and clear, and you attain it or you do not attain it, there is no middle ground. In Wagner there is a middle ground, which consists of the moving bogs of error and illusion. Italian music is like Italian dancing, a bungler cannot succeed in it. To sprawl about the stage in all sorts of cheap and facile attitudes is not dancing, and this sprawling and posing can be attained by anyone who cares to practise it for a few weeks dressed in a flimsy costume. But it requires some grace to stand on your toes with the desired effect, and still more grace and dexterity to whirl yourself about the stage as if you were assisted by invisible wings.

During the past thirty or forty years the stage has lost the sense of proportion and discrimination, and licence has ruled over art and inspiration. In the lyrical world it is easier to shout than to sing, and perhaps this is the reason the Wagnerian rôles have

been shouted up and the great Italian rôles howled down. No one can induce me to believe that the rôle of Kundry is as difficult to sing as the rôle of Lucrezia Borgia, or Fides, or Valentina. Art consists in absolute knowledge, absolute assurance, and a serene application of knowledge to time, place, and condition. At its highest it has no place for guess-work, no time for trying, and, above all, no inclination for risks and experiments. In spite of its spiritual nature there is in all art something mathematical and precise.

In Italian opera of the old school the music is as fixed as the multiplication table. The notes to be sung are there, and all through the score the singer must sing the notes with the correct accent and the correct phrasing. In Wagner's *Ring* there are always two or three artistes who wrestle with the part like so many athletes or amazons. I remember poor Alvary as Tannhäuser (at Bayreuth). Long before the night fixed for the first performance he explained to me at his residence all about the high note to be *attacked*, and how most of the tenors had to omit this note. At last, after he had spent months of hard work on Tannhäuser,

we heard the high note, emitted with the greatest difficulty, and the pain we experienced spoiled for us the whole of that scene.

At that time lovers of Wagner were still fighting hard battles for the glory of the Bayreuth performances; and in the notice I wrote of this performance for my Paris journal I purposely refrained from mentioning Alvary's failure to sing this exceedingly difficult rôle as it ought to be sung. Such battles are no longer necessary, and we can now speak plainly.

The truth is, in their efforts to render Wagner triumphant all along the line, music lovers passed over the blemishes in the music and the singing on all occasions, and in this way the errors and blunders have at last become like a legitimate part of every Wagnerian rôle. Nevertheless, a reaction is at hand. The time has come to repudiate shouting, screaming, facial contortions, the husky tenor, and the hustling sopranos, the absurd *leit motif*, the mixture of metaphysics and musical drama.

There is no such thing as philosophical music. We might as well talk of philo-

sophical acting. All art develops and proceeds by stages of three. When the third and last stage is achieved the recession begins. With Debussy, and others of the new schools, we are in the second stage of the reaction. The next will land us in a full revival of all the great operas of Meyerbeer, Verdi, and Mozart. One day we shall hear *Come e bello* sung as it should be in *Lucrezia Borgia*, although I must confess I have never yet heard it perfectly sung, not even by Titjens at Covent Garden in the 'seventies. Such music is only for the true divas of the lyrical stage.

During the past hundred years the operatic stage has seen three supreme dramatic singers: Schröder-Devrient, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, and Hedwig Reicher-Kindermann—who did so much for Wagner's music, and who passed away at the age of twenty-nine, at Trieste, after a series of unparalleled successes in Italy. Neumann, in his *Recollections of Wagner*, says: "Like a voice from a far-off world rang out her mighty tones—deep, mystical, soul-reaching, and con-

vincing." No singer on the Wagnerian stage has ever equalled her, as no singer on the French stage has ever equalled Pauline Viardot-Garcia.

Only those who have passed through the magic circle of sounds, who have been repeatedly plunged in a musical vortex of emotions, can tell us with any authority what the exaltation is like, and even then words can never be made to describe the sensations and states created by the transports of vocal music.

It was in the summer of 1871 at Baden-Baden that I first met Madame Viardot-Garcia. I had gone to Baden on a visit to some friends living there, and shortly after my arrival I was asked by the Bishop of Baden-Baden to sing in the cathedral at High Mass; and among the invitations which my success brought on this occasion was a cordial one from Madame Viardot-Garcia, who was still at her villa in the Lichtenthaler Allée, near the celebrated gaming-rooms. Baden-Baden was at that time the most fashionable summer resort in Europe; the King and Queen of Prussia spent the summer there; Johann Strauss, the

Viennese waltz king, the composer of the *Fledermaus*, was there from Vienna, with his famous orchestra, whose open-air performances every afternoon and evening were to thousands of visitors perpetual musical feasts, as free as air and as light and refreshing ; while at the opera some of the most gifted singers were to be heard, with Gabrielle Krauss from the Paris Opera as leading star.

The greatest waltz composer the world has ever known, the composer of the *Blue Danube* and several hundred other waltzes, all more or less popular, Strauss was the principal musical attraction of Baden ; he was a nervous and electric man, who inspired the whole orchestra with his personality. People went to see him conduct as they would to a show. All his best waltzes were heard here during the season ; but for me his genius was not displayed so much in his waltzes as in the introductions. I was never moved to enthusiasm by Viennese waltz music, not even by the *Blue Danube*, conducted by the composer, but I could sit for hours enjoying Strauss' "introductions," if I could hear them played alone as compositions by themselves.

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This beautiful little town was the half-way house between Vienna and Paris, between Italy and Russia. Its pleasures were those of Vienna and Paris, the general atmosphere that symbolised by the tone, the movement, and the character of the waltz; the Strauss music made the famous roulette wheels hum with a merrier sound, and the mazes of the waltz prepared many a visitor for the still more intoxicating mazes of the green tables so close at hand. Who knows how many suicides were prevented by the Viennese band, with its light, but optimistic melodies? The musical imagination balks at the mere suggestion of the orchestra greeting the victims of the roulette tables with airs such as, "Ah, I have sighed to rest me," from *Trovatore*, or, "Adieu to the Past," from *La Traviata*, with the Black Forest so near at hand.

Baden-Baden was a meeting-place for the greatest writers, composers, and artistes of France, Russia, Germany, and Austria, and it was no mere stroke of chance that caused Viardot-Garcia, the most cosmopolitan lyrical artiste that the stage has ever known, to make her home in this fascinating spot.

Here she had a court of her own, where she conversed fluently in half-a-dozen languages. She was a Spaniard by temperament, a Frenchwoman by marriage, a German in philosophy,* and by her long and enigmatical friendship with Tourgenieff sufficiently Russian to manage, if she did not understand, that unrivalled and enigmatical genius. Her villa at Baden-Baden was a world of art and romance, where she was fêted and honoured by poets, composers, and social leaders. Amidst all the glory and flattery she remained not only the mistress of her talent, but of her destiny, being in this unlike her gifted sister, Malibran, who, by her life of incessant musical and social agitation, ruined her health and died at the age of twenty-eight.

On my first visit to the Viardot villa I was somewhat surprised to see a woman with features so plain. Her age was about fifty, and she had that dignity which is natural to Spaniards of distinction; but, after being in her presence a short time, her face became so animated that I thought her almost handsome. I soon became convinced that her many triumphs had not been the result

of a charming face and a beautiful complexion, aided by conventional singing and the banal praises of conventional critics. In Paris, I had met musical directors and professors such as Wartel, the teacher of Jenny Lind, Marie Roze, and Christine Nilsson ; Luigi de Sievers, who gave Rossini lessons on the organ ; Samuel David, Auber, and others ; but Pauline Viardot-Garcia was a personality the like of whom I had never encountered. We talked of music, singing, and especially of improvisation. She had much to say about Liszt, Chopin, Thalberg, and Kalkbrenner. She was particularly interested in hearing about my reception by Auber, who was Director of the Conservatoire during my first sojourn in Paris.

On one occasion, in the evening, Madame Viardot-Garcia sang the principal air of Fides in *Le Prophète*, the rôle she created at the Académie Royale de Musique, in Paris, under the direction of Meyerbeer, the composer of the opera, and I then realised the full meaning of Alfred de Musset's words when he said of her : "Elle possède le grand secret des artistes ; avant d'exprimer elle sent. Ce n'est pas sa voix qu'elle écoute, c'est son

cœur." But I think Heine's account of her singing best expresses my own sensations on that memorable evening. Writing of music in Paris in the 'forties, he says :

"Despite the presence here of that charming couple, Mario and Grisi, we miss Madame Pauline Viardot, or, as we prefer to call her, La Garcia. She is not replaced, and no one can replace her. She is not a nightingale who has only the single talent of her kind, and who exquisitely sobs and trills in the style of spring ; nor is she a rose, for she is ugly, but of a kind of ugliness that is noble—I might almost say beautiful, and which often enraptured the great painter of lions, Delacroix. In fact, Madame Garcia reminds us much less of civilised beauty and the tame grace of our European homeland, than of the strange splendour of an exotic wilderness ; and in many periods of her passionate singing, as when she opens too widely her great mouth with its dazzling white teeth, and smiles with such horrible sweetness and such a gracefully charming grimace, one feels at the instant as if the most marvellous and monstrous growths and living creatures of India and Africa were before us ; as if giant palms

enlaced by thousand-flowered *lianas* were shooting up all around; nor would one be astonished if suddenly a leopard or a giraffe, or even a herd of young elephants, should run across the stage. Quels piétinements! quels coups de trompe! quel talent grandiose!"

Pauline Viardot-Garcia was one of the few lyrical artistes who succeeded in captivating poets, writers, critics, and composers alike. I had heard, at the Paris Opera, Madame Miolan Carvalho as Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*, her original rôle; Titjens at Covent Garden; and, at the opera in Baden-Baden, Gabrielle Krauss, the leading singer of the Paris Opera of that year; but all these faded away from the memory after hearing La Garcia. What Heine wrote was true. She was a great creative personality, and it is not so surprising that Tourgenieff remained under her spell from the first time he heard her sing at Moscow in 1841, when she was twenty, until his death, a period of close upon forty years.

The Garcia family was the most wonderful family of modern times, and Pauline Garcia one of the four most wonderful women living

in the period from 1840 to the end of the century, the other three being Letizia Bonaparte-Rattazzi, Georges Sand, and Princess Helene Racowitza. Georges Sand was the only one of the four whom I did not know personally. They were all masters of men. In their hands men of talent often became as putty, and genius as potter's clay. To write about these celebrities with anything like historical accuracy would mean writing about all the greatest men in the world of art, literature, politics, and music of Continental Europe from 1840 to the close of the century.

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